# Retro, history and nostalgia: Rethinking popular memory and the 1950s

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I hereby declare that this thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other University for a degree:

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Summary:

This thesis examines how and why we remember the 1950s in Britain in particular ways. The 1950s have become a popular and visible decade in the culture of 'retro' since the late-1960s; there is a stylistic fascination with iconic symbols that have become shorthand for the post-war era. Popular memory is the everyday sense of a past which circulates in a particular culture through the interaction of past and present, public and private, which is expressed and experienced through memory, media and commodities. I interrogate how popular memory is expressed nostalgically through 'Fifties' retro and heritage in Britain, revealing the tensions between past and present in the politics of remembering.

In the main, studies of popular representations of the past through nostalgia and retro have largely remained within the boundaries of academic disciplines such as subcultural studies, design/art history and collective memory theory. I use this scholarship in combination to analyse our popular historical culture because a popular sense of the past is created and experienced by an interaction of many different cultural expressions, experiences and representations. Using an interdisciplinary approach, this project blends interviews with fans of Fifties revival culture with other sources such as memories from the Mass Observation Archive, period dramas on film and television, retro in popular music, as well as press reception on retro and nostalgia. This innovative methodology foregrounds the tensions and politics of

representing the past, challenging the notion of popular memory of the 1950s as merely ‘retro’ consumerism and manipulated history.

Recent academic thought has emphasised the ‘presentness’ of nostalgia; that this emotional, rose-tinted view of the past is actually a response to the present. This project suggests nostalgia can be used with agency – individuals and communities use nostalgic images for a wide range of personal and political meanings; nostalgia can also be dynamic and pleasurable. We remember the past through family albums and personal memory, but these interact with mediated pasts in retro popular culture, favourite films and period dramas. My research calls for a more democratic approach to historical study which considers not just ‘what happened’ in the past but the politics of how we imagine and re-imagine the past.

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## List of illustrations and abbreviations

Abbreviations:

i/v – interview
q/r – questionnaire response
MO – Mass Observation
CCCS – Birmingham Centre for Cultural Studies

Questionnaire respondent names who are quoted in the text have been anonymised. All interviewees are referred to by their first names apart from those with duplicated names who have their surnames abbreviated as follows:

Dave F – Dave Fitzgerald
Dave P – Dave Penny
Ralph W – Ralph Whyte
Ralph S – Ralph Sayers

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Contents

## Introduction: Popular Memory and the Politics of Retro

> Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past. (Orwell, 1949, p.199)

> The sense of the past, at any given point of time, is quite as much a matter of history as what happened in it (Samuel, 1994, p.15).

This project considers the idea of retro as a cultural phenomenon in Britain, its association with history and heritage, and the relationship between past and present through the case study of the 'Fifties revival'.[1] I consider the politics of aestheticising the past in stylistic and material terms, in fashion, design, furniture, leisure revivals, music and so on. A quotation from George Orwell may seem a grandiose way to embark on a project largely concerned with the fripperies of style and its promiscuous trends. However, it implies the political potential at the heart of consuming the past through various aspects of the Fifties revival explored in the forthcoming chapters: jive dancing, tea parties, plastic pink flamingos, 1950s-themed holiday camps, Liberace, domestic kitsch, pick-up trucks, and Coronation Chicken. These objects of so-called 'retro' culture feed into our sense of the past through offering an aesthetic and material intimacy with the past across numerous lifestyle practices: fashion, leisure, food, music and more. This project explores the apparent intimacy with

[1] A note on the text: apart from quotations from other people I follow the lead of Christine Sprengler and utilise her method of using different terms to signify the actual historical time of the 1950s and the imagined, mythical 'Fifties'. In a similar way to Sprengler: 'By the Fifties I mean to signify the mythic, nostalgic construct, while the 1950s will be reserved for the actual historical period of time between 1950 and 1959 and all its social, political and cultural complexities.' (2009 p.39). For my purposes, 'Fifties' signifies the popular memory idea of the 1950s – formed in combination by a melting pot of mediated sources, actual memories, old photographs, authentic artefacts and retro facsimiles. Hence, my reference to the 'Fifties revival' encompasses both the subcultural throwback to the 'Fifties', as well as the wider popularity of Fifties styles, which in my view bleed into one another. However, like Sprengler, I recognise the interlinked nature of history and our perception of it: 'this is not as neat and unproblematic a separation as this semantic distinction might imply.' (ibid.) I utilise these semantic distinctions in an effort to avoid confusion for the reader but acknowledge that in some places these divisions will be blurred because of the overlapping nature of the actual historical past and the imagined, represented past.

the past which retro offers while also interrogating how these displays and practices are bound up in the tensions and politics of our contested view of the past.

Orwell suggests there are potential power dynamics at the heart of representing the past, which can lead to a deceptive use of a mythical past by the powerful; a skewed and selective version of the past. The power dynamics created by positions of gender, class, sexuality and race (for example) run through both the representation and reception of images of the past. I use the word politics throughout the thesis not in a party political sense, but as an expression of the tension and struggle at the heart of historical knowledge: whose history is being represented? By 'politics' I mean to follow Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone in terms of focusing on the dynamics of history and memory through the notion of 'contested pasts':

> The idea of contest in the literal sense is apparently a straightforward one: it evokes a struggle in the terrain of truth. If what is disputed is the course of events – what really happened – new answers, particularly by groups whose knowledge has previously been discounted, may challenge dominant or privileged narratives. But to contest the past is also, of course, to pose questions about the present, and what the past means in the present. Our understanding of the past has strategic, political, and ethical consequences. (2003, p1)

Of particular importance is the latter part of the quotation above, in terms of the 'strategic, political and ethical consequences' of communicating the past. This suggests that there are a whole host of questions to be asked about how and why certain knowledge of the past circulates as well as what is at stake in the stories we tell about the past.

While retro is in some ways a taken-for-granted lifestyle trend, analysing its reception in more detail reveals some concerns related to the above in terms of 'contesting' the truth of the past related to retro's playful attitude and apparent

'return' to lifestyles and cultural products of the past. With a promiscuous and playful attitude to history and bound up with consumer trends, is retro merely a misleading and suspicious mirage of the past? It is possible to dismiss retro culture as an expression of a culture running out of ideas (as in Reynolds, 2011) and also relate retro to how we think about history: retro implicates nostalgia, a somewhat maligned term associated in some ways with 'ill-remembered', commodified and inauthentic history. Indeed, retro represents a terrain of myths, clichés and stereotypes, easy targets for challenge by the rigours of academic history as well as memory/experience of 'how it really was'. In the History Workshop publication *The Imagined Past*, editors Malcolm Chase and Christopher Shaw reflected on the issues of nostalgia as a 'contemporary malaise'. (1989, p.1). Nonetheless, in the same volume, David Lowenthal offered a more nuanced reading of nostalgia, suggesting it can be defined by its 'presentness', looking back from a safe position of present hindsight (ibid., p.28). Despite acknowledging the relationship of nostalgia to the present rather than the past, the editors of this History Workshop special edition book were evidently still uncomfortable with nostalgia, conceiving it as a sickness fed by 'comfortable and conveniently reassuring images of the past, thereby supressing both its variety and its negative aspects' (ibid., p.1).

Raphael Samuel, a founder of the History Workshop movement, was about to challenge this view with his freewheeling and sometimes whimsical exploration of representations of the past in popular culture in all its forms – *Theatres of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (1994). Samuel's key focus, as highlighted in the quotation which opens this introduction, was that 'sense of the past' which circulates in popular culture and

everyday life, and how perceptions of the past are made meaningful in and for the present. Deftly negotiating a prodigious array of sources and informal histories, Samuel weaves in and amongst re-enactment societies, repeats of old television series, period dramas, vintage shops, 're-Victorianized' pubs (1994, p.83), living museums and old photographs. Samuel wrote with a passion and lightness of touch about the possibility of studying the past beginning with typical, everyday culture rather than the theories of professional academia. In a bid to support Samuel's assertion above, this thesis confronts and engages retro, not in a way that is condescending to its practices and representations, but in a way that considers retro as part of the popular memory of the 1950s.

Central to my analysis is Raphael Samuel's focus on the idea of popular memory which considers history as 'a social form of knowledge; the work, in any given instance, of a thousand different hands' (1994, p.8). He argues for a re-visioning of history to include the multiple narratives of popular memory from sources high and low. This relates to the idea of popular memory defined by the Popular Memory Group in the early 1980s as having a stake in the 'social production of memory' (1982, p.207). Popular memory represents a form of public common-sense history where a sense of the past is created through an interaction between 'public representations and private memory' (ibid.). Recognising the power dynamics which can declare the past as unified, traditional and static, I argue that retro offers possibilities for representing the past as a site of conflict and tension. Bill Schwarz's observation that for Samuel, 'history, more broadly conceived, is a discursive field riven by antagonism' (Schwarz, 2012, pviii), is a notion that resonates through this thesis. These antagonisms do not necessarily 'inform' us about the past in any

straightforward sense, though they can reveal the processes of constructing historical knowledge and how the past is used in the present. Importantly, I assert that perceptions of the past are socially constructed through the *active* engagement and intimate practices of ordinary people in everyday life.

This project highlights the value of the popular, everyday sense of the past and the interaction of competing memories, images and myths that make up popular memory of the past. I explore the processes and meanings of popular interpretations of the past and their relevance for the present. I assert that there is a dialogic relationship between individual agency, personal history, representation and consumption in terms of perpetuating and maintaining the popular perception of the past. Michel Foucault has seen popular memory as being reprogrammed by the 'apparatuses' of popular culture such as 'cheap books', television and film (1989, p.123). However, I contend that the site of popular memory is not a simple binary between passive consumers and powerful producers of nostalgic propaganda; it is a complex site of struggle and individual agency where meanings are negotiated and produced across private and public representations.

*Exploring popular culture and retro*

Raphael Samuel's journey through the myriad varieties of representations and perceptions of the past has been highly influential on this project. His intervention in historical study fits into a trajectory of cultural studies work developing a focus on everyday life and interdisciplinary methodologies. In some ways *about* the 1950s, this project has in many ways emerged *from* the 1950s; it is a descendent of a line of enquiry which in many ways challenged the boundaries between high and low culture, making legitimate academic

enquiry out of the objects and everyday life practices of popular culture. This line of historical and cultural study emerged from the 1950s through work such as Richard Hoggart's Juke-box boys (Hoggart, 1957), Raymond Williams' reflections on his own experience growing up in a village in Wales (Williams, 1973), Paul Thompson's celebration of ordinary people's stories (Thompson, 1978), the cultural practices of youth and 'subcultures' explored by the influential Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (Hall and Jefferson, 1975, Willis, 1978 and Hebdige, 1979).

Alongside this is retro culture's position as a particular feature of post-war Britain, as Samuel states, 'Economically, retrochic could be described as a child of the post-war boom' (Samuel, 1994, p.98) across the various whimsical ways of presenting the past-as-entertainment as well as the rise of second-hand culture and 'alternative consumerism', re-released records, and mass marketed 'pop' culture (pp.98 – 109). Furthermore, the intensified reproduction of the past and a culture of retro has also been 'technology-led' (p.83), not only through mass printing techniques such as 'the advent of litho printing' (ibid.) but further through mass visual technologies such as television, cinema, photography and the internet which have allowed an intimacy and immediate visual connection with the past.

Samuel utilises a culture of 'retrochic' to explore the relationship between past and present in popular memory; seemingly a style concerned with the past, the playfulness of retro situates it squarely in the present. While it is tempting to focus on the intensification of 'retro' in post-war Britain from the development of retro shops as distinct from second hand stores in the late-1960s, Samuel does not depict retro as a sudden explosion of the post-war years. He links the idea

of ‘retro’ to copyism in ancient decorative art, the recycling of old images in painting, and early revival ‘fads’ such as the vogue for Egyptian style in the early 19th century (p.110) as well as strongly influencing Art Deco in the 1920s (p.111). Indeed, the free play of retro style, which takes objects and places them out of time or context, was enabled not just by the 1960s pop artists such as Ray Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol that frequently line the walls of retro 1950s diners and homes but by the elevation to art of the ‘objet trouvé’ of Dada and Surrealism (p.110). Retro has enabled the possibilities of playing with the past, both venerating and disrespecting history as it revives cultural and aesthetic aspects of the past and mixes them together in the present.

However, Samuel conceives ‘retrochic’ as a broader cultural phenomenon beginning, perhaps fittingly for this project, with the ‘teddy boy’ trend of the early 1950s which ‘welled up from nowhere’ (p.112). The teddy boys combined a look influenced by Edwardian aristocracy, the American jazz scene of the 1920s, and gangsters of the 1940s – Richard Hoggart’s milk-bar dwellers with their ‘drape-suits, picture ties, and an American slouch.’ (1957, p.248). This, Samuel argues, was unlike the earlier ‘crazes’ for revivals such as Gothic or Neo-classicism in the early 20th century which was limited to ‘small circles of connoisseurs’ (1994, p.111). Instead, the teddy boys represented the start of a more democratic and widespread play with the past which ‘profited from the boom in, and democratization of, new classes of collectibles’ (p.112) and was frequently unsentimental and promiscuous with the past. Indeed, Angela Carter identified the potential in the late-1960s for practices of bricolage – the mixing up of various different (and often clashing) stylistic objects – which contributed to the possibility and desirability of a ‘retro’ style:

> Eclectic fragments, robbed of their symbolic content, fall together to form a new whole, a dramatisation of the individual, a personal style. And fashion today […] is a question of style, no longer a question of items in harmony. 'What to wear with what' is no longer a burning question; in the 1960s, everything is worn all at once. (Carter, 1997, p.106)

As Samuel notes, in the 1960s, 'dressing up in period clothes' (1994, p.97) became vogue, whether the pastoral Victoriana of Laura Ashley (p.92) or the 'kinky' glamour of Art Deco (p.96).

Linguistically, in reviving styles of the past, 'vintage' can often imply some sense of a real period artefact or antique, while 'retro' signifies a sense of imitation, copy or replica. Raphael Samuel brings vintage and retro together to suggest that retrochic combines both original and replica ephemera from the past:

> Retrochic trades on inversion, discovering hitherto unnoticed beauties in the flotsam and jetsom of everyday life; elevating yesterday's cast-offs into antique clothes and vintage wear; and treating the out-of-date and the anachronistic – or imitations of them – as though they were the latest thing…It will make a cult of Hollywood B-movies, 'space age' wrist watches, Dan Dare comics, flying ducks. (1994, p.85)

The broader notion of retrochic as a popular cultural style practice not only copies past design, it frequently combines originals and copies, and elevates the cultural and historical value of everyday items from home design to fashion and other wares. As such, retro culture is multifaceted and can be related to old and new, 'alternative' cultures as well as consumption and capitalism, pleasure in the present through constructing a lifestyle around the objects and styles of bygone days. The wide-reaching influence of retro seeping into subcultures, home décor, clothing, lifestyle practices, images of the past, has influenced my broad approach to sources and methodologies to explore this concept.

*Democratising history: rethinking nostalgia*

The culture of 'retrochic' emerged alongside a developing scholarship which viewed popular culture and its audiences more sympathetically. The increase in volume of visual media through advertising, photography and films as well as its increasingly embedded nature in everyday life (from television in the domestic sphere through to mobile phones in our pockets) has produced a trend of cultural studies which does not necessarily view the interpretation and production of media and cultural products from the 'top down'. I follow Stuart Hall in terms of suggesting that popular culture is a site where individuals and communities are active in participating, interpreting and negotiating their own meanings (Hall, 1997, p.1). There is now a rich literature on what could broadly be called 'cultural' or 'popular' memory; the interactive role of visual media (film, television, photography) with our perception of the past, both in our interactions with the media as objects and the media's representational practices.[2]

Popular memory fits into the broad scholarship on collective memory: the idea of memory beyond an individual function, negotiated in terms of the social world. Maurice Halbwachs is frequently viewed as a landmark scholar of collective memory, suggesting that knowledge of the past is created through contextual memories based on interactions between individual and group affiliations in society such as class, nationality and family.[3] As Lewis A. Coser has noted in the preface to his edited selection of Halbwach's writings on memory, 'Collective memory, Halbwachs shows, is not a given but rather a

[2] For example, see Spigel, 1992, Rosenstone, 1995, Landy, 1996, Grainge, ed., 2003, Cook, 2005, Wheatley, ed., 2007, De Groot, 2009 and Holdsworth, 2011.
[3] In their wide-ranging collection of key writings on collective memory, Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi and Levy eds. (2011) describe how the term collective memory is frequently traced back to Halbwachs' suggestion memory is 'first of all a matter of how minds work together in a society' (p.18).

socially constructed notion.' (Halbwachs, 1992, p22). Indeed, as opposed to memory experienced as some 'pure' subjective certainty, Halbwachs was notable for pointing out the contingent and social formulation of memory, as well as the role of the present stating, 'even at the moment of reproducing the past our imagination remains under the influence of the present social milieu' (1992, p49). While popular memory can be seen as emerging from the evolution of collective memory studies, I use the term popular memory rather than collective memory because popular memory studies has foregrounded the dynamic of struggle and agency in memory, or memory as 'counter-memory'. As Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi and Levy (eds.) state in relation to the development of 'popular memory' studies:

> many scholars have […] advanced an "instrumentalist" approach to collective memory, emphasising not what memory does, but what we do with memory. Collective memory, as it turns out, is an extraordinarily useful tool of politics and is also continually subject to it. At the heart of instrumentalist perspectives is the recognition that collective memory is essentially contested: there is a great deal at stake in how we represent the past, and different groups in societies struggle to advance their own view of the past and its meanings. (2011, p249)

It could be said that in some ways popular memory represents an unruly offspring of collective memory studies, disrespecting boundaries between public and private memory, highlighting tensions, clashes and disjuncture. Popular memory also offers an outlet for what Raphael Samuel calls 'unofficial knowledge' (1994, p3). That is, the role of various individuals, collectors and institutions *outside* the academy in constructing history and perceptions of the past from the 'bottom-up'; history as a 'social form of knowledge' (1994, p8). As such, within my analysis of popular memory I am influenced by the possibilities of complicating theoretical discourse and sweeping, linear histories by using oral history methodologies which often bring out competing and diverse

historical narratives. Along with this, I also use the autobiographical accounts of everyday life found in the methods of Mass Observation[4] which at its inception seemed framed as a channel for 'unofficial knowledge', aiming in part 'to burst the bubble of official reports, governmental understanding, and received opinion.' (Highmore, 2007). In summary, I have combined methods and sources from memory studies which explore the vagaries and non-systematic ways that people engage with imagined pasts through perceptions, myths and consumption. Crucially, these methods and sources also foreground the tensions, competing voices and the role of the present, which are key parts of the struggle for knowledge about the past.

Raphael Samuel asserts that the creation and interpretation of historical knowledge needs to be reclaimed from the hierarchy of established academic scholarship which holds 'the unspoken assumption that knowledge filters downwards':

> At the apex there are the chosen few who pilot new techniques, uncover fresh sources of documentation, and formulate arresting hypotheses. […] All of this involves a very hierarchical view of the constitution of knowledge, and a very restricted one. Fetishizing the act of research while ignoring its conditions of existence (1994, pp.4 - 5).

Samuel's assertion that everyone is a historian is liberating. While the founders of Mass Observation suggested their methods allowed the accounts of ordinary people to 'speak for themselves' (Charles Madge qtd. in Calder/Sheridan, 1984, p.151) – it is important to recognise the role of the researcher in reading these

[4] Acknowledging the various changes in terminology during its long history, I utilise the same distinctions as Annebella Pollen in her overview of the debates surrounding the research methods of Mass Observation: 'Mass Observation in its broadest sense – as an organization and a body of material covering the period from 1937 to the present – will be referred to […] as MO. Material from the post-1981 Mass Observation revival […] will be referred to by its current name, the Mass Observation Project (MOP). The location where the materials are stored, and the organization that manages them, is referred to throughout as the Mass Observation Archive (MOA).' (Pollen, 2013, p.231)

accounts, whether of the old ‘observation’ project or the greater focus on autobiographical correspondence from 1981 onwards. Ben Highmore notes with Mass Observation that we should not view the documents as ‘simply transparent, unmediated shards of reality’ (Highmore, 2007) and it is important to be mindful of the symbolic nature of autobiography, memory and how people describe their own subjective everyday lives. Furthermore, as Ken Plummer writes on memory, some individual memories can turn into narratives, ‘where highly selective stories dredged from the past somehow seem to have taken on a life of their own.’ (2001, p.235). This is not to dismiss the validity of ethnographic or autobiographical research but to demonstrate the importance of an *awareness* of the qualities and kinds of ‘social memories’ which Plummer suggests ‘need to be considered in understanding a life.’ (p.237). As such, it would be misjudged to view first-hand accounts of experience as simply another kind of universal truth. Nonetheless, Samuel’s passion for ‘unofficial knowledge’ has inspired the method for this project – both in terms of sourcing interviews with people actually involved in the Fifties revival as well as examining the seemingly throwaway ephemera of retro. I use this method not because interviews with actual people provide ‘answers’ or ‘facts’ but because ‘unofficial’ sources, as in Mass Observation methods, can ‘disturb and undermine our most cherished beliefs’ (Highmore, 2007) and can interrupt the taken-for-granted theoretical academic status quo.

Alongside studies in ordinary lives, popular culture and consumption, a more sympathetic appraisal of nostalgia has emerged. The association of nostalgia with the aestheticisation of history has been critiqued as a distracting, idealistic falsification of history:

> For the English today, it seems, there is no national culture alternative, except nostalgia – the construction of a largely bogus heritage. This is where the residual cultural nationalism of England has taken refuge these past few years, in pursuit of an ill-remembered past – where the decades and the centuries are hopelessly intermingled. Historical novels, Merchant Ivory films, Victorian lamp standards all form part of this bizarre phenomenon. (Richard Gott qtd. in Cook, 1996, p.1).

Retro frequently utilises nostalgia and this 'hopeless intermingling' of time periods is a key part of its aesthetics. Above, Gott characterises nostalgia as false and passive view of the past purged of any tension and debate. This nostalgic view of the past is particularly produced by visual means: film, television, the revival of objects and styles. Indeed, Fredric Jameson used nostalgia to critique the American 'nostalgia film' of the 1970s, a particular kind of mediated, simplified visual reconstruction of the past that demonstrates a lack of 'historicity'. Vera Dika (2003) focuses on this viewpoint in her analysis of nostalgia in the Fifties-set *Grease* (1978). While Dika does recognise a past/present relationship in the depictions in *Grease*, suggesting the representation of the 1950s is more indicative of the social context of the 1970s, she focuses her analysis on the idea of *Grease* as presenting a dangerous deception of history. According to Dika, *Grease* is appealing because it makes the past 'silly' (2003, p.125) and omits 'any remembered personal trauma of an adolescent past, as well as any regional, class, race, or gender conflicts in that era. What we get instead is commodified memory, one now set in a mythic past where all hurts are resolvable.' (p.127).

However, in other accounts of nostalgia, the focus has moved away from the idea of falsified history but looking more at how nostalgia actually functions, makes meaning, and can actually critique the present. Svetlana Boym has advanced the perspective on nostalgia beyond the notion of its original

recognition as a medical affliction that 'was said to produce 'erroneous representations' that caused the afflicted to lose touch with the present.' (2001, p.3). Scholars of popular culture such as film have also reappraised nostalgia in terms of both how it operates for audiences/viewers as well as the dynamics and possible tensions depicted in nostalgic visions of the past. For example, Pam Cook[5] contends:

> Critiques of nostalgia films condemn them for de-historicising the past, for creating a timeless zone outside social change and historical analysis. This implies a particular view of history and social change, as though they are themselves free from subjective emotion and the processes of representation. (2005, p.16).

Not only critiquing the very notion of historical authenticity as problematic, Cook also suggests that the playful nature of visual nostalgic fictions can actually create an imaginative space where the past can be critiqued: 'The past is presented as a site for a complex imaginative encounter, combining fantasy, emotion and critical judgement, to which the knowledge that it can never be fully retrieved is essential.' (2005, p.11). The 1950s period drama *Far From Heaven* (2002) is mentioned by Cook as implicating this dynamic – imitating in over-exaggerated style the films of Douglas Sirk, the film juxtaposes a nostalgic, picture-perfect Fifties world with depictions of unhappy marriages, inter-racial relationships and homosexuality. The film allows for an agency in the audience, creating a disjuncture between past and present, rather than placing the viewer in a position of passive reception of a fabricated past. I particularly focus on the idea of nostalgia as a multifaceted position which can be used to sell products and create myths, but also be used actively for pleasure and critique.[6] As part

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[5] Other insightful examples of film scholars interrogating the meanings of nostalgia, cinema and memory include Kuhn, 2002 and Sprengler, 2009.

[6] Research at the University of Southampton even suggests nostalgia can be good for us: 'When engaging in nostalgic reflection, people report a stronger sense of belongingness,

of my own intervention into the analysis of nostalgia I illustrate the processes of nostalgia by actually speaking to individuals involved in Fifties revival activities about how they use the past in the present, rather than just reading the aesthetic display of their practices. My approach and method foregrounds experience and subjective accounts which illustrate that nostalgia can be deployed in the present with agency, opening up space for debate and reflexivity on our relationship with the past. I demonstrate the operation of nostalgia along these lines throughout the thesis, with a particular focus in Chapter 3 on the idea of myths and the 1950s.

*Growing up with the Fifties*

My research methodology exploring how nostalgic images are used with agency rather than just passively consumed first emerged from my own experience of retro and passion for Fifties-style artefacts and imagery. My own enjoyment of retro culture has made it difficult to accept negative and sweeping accounts of nostalgic, aesthetic representations of the past such as Chase and Shaw's assertion that the 'competing voices and pictures' of our 'illustrated history' necessarily 'call our attention from the history books and from magazines' (1989, p.10). Based on my own experience I found this approach simplistic and snobbish, as in Raymond Williams' use of his own experience of working-class culture to react against Marxist theories of 'a dying culture, and that the masses are ignorant' (1973, p.96). In a similar way I challenge the idea that the appreciation of images of the past through films, television and objects

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affiliation, or sociality; they convey higher continuity between their past and their present; they describe their lives as more meaningful; and they often indicate higher levels of self-esteem and positive mood. Although nostalgic engagement (especially when it is carried out habitually and excessively) may not be beneficial to all, it is in general a resource on which people can capitalize to harness strength—a resource that allows them to cope more effectively with the vicissitudes of life.' (Southampton University 'Nostalgia Group' website)

is a simplistic exchange and creates a one-dimensional sense of the past because, to echo Williams, this 'is not what I have known and see.' (Williams, 1973, p.96). My own experience and perception of growing up enjoying representations of the past (and in particular mid-century styles) has been a much more complex and curious landscape where subjective experience, family stories, old photographs, worked alongside mediated images, consumption, and favourite films.

My own position to this project is important not only because it has motivated my chosen methodology but also because I am aware I have my own preconceptions and ideas about the Fifties, which came from a variety of both mediated and specifically situated sources. As a child growing up watching television in the 1980s, I recall being fascinated by original 1950s TV series *I Love Lucy* (1951 – 1957) as well as the 1970s-does-the-1950s series *Happy Days* (1974 – 1984) which were both shown at tea time. The purchase of our first VHS video player in 1987 allowed repeated viewings of many favourite films, some of which were made in the 1950s and 1960s, some of which involved reconstructions or references to the era: *Grease* (1978), *Back To The Future* (1985), *Edward Scissorhands* (1994), and various films starring Doris Day from the 1950s and 1960s.

In my 20s, I moved away from the jeans, t-shirts and grungy looks of my teenage years towards exploring the quirky/alternative looks of vintage styles. My eye is still drawn to clothes which hint at these references with retro-shaped dresses, bold colours and whimsical textile designs. Growing up and developing my own tastes in terms of home décor, I have a voracious appetite for charity shops, populating my house with G-plan furniture, the odd bit of

Queen Elizabeth Coronation memorabilia, whimsically decorated ceramic-ware such as Ridgeway's 'Homemaker' design, and most recently a framed facsimile print of the bright yellow poster for the 'Black Eyes and Lemonade' exhibition of popular art held at the Whitechapel Gallery as part of the Festival of Britain in 1951 (having obviously never attended the original exhibition but instead a reprise at the same gallery in 2013). Having never previously been interested in partner dancing, a few years ago I took a course of swing dance classes and would similarly like to jive. Discovering my grandmother's old recipe books, I nostalgically remembered specific moments of her cooking, marvelled at her hand-written notes tucked inside the pages, as well as the quaint typography and illustrative graphics of the books. I am captivated by old photographs: from the black and white photographs of my grandmother at Southampton Lido in the 1930s, I have considered how her poses are reminiscent of publicity shots for starlets from the Hollywood golden age:

Image 1: My grandmother, Eileen Sims, at Southampton Lido in the 1930s.

Equally, I can find enjoyment in the more general visual culture of shop signs, stock photography, and the shared humour and irony of the now-recognised sexism of old advertisements on websites such as Retronaut.com. Describing itself as a 'photographic time machine', the site launched in 2010 exploring history through old photographs which focus on the obsessions of 'retro': aspects of the everyday, eccentric, iconic and the weird.

These examples illustrate that while I do not entirely follow a dedicated Fifties retro lifestyle, I am an attentive, interested, critically engaged observer and part-time participant, with my own taste for 'mid-century modern'. In this sense I am neither unfamiliar with nor completely immersed in the more dedicated activities of the Fifties revival, which also gives me an insight into the ways that an interest in the past, collecting the past, or embodying the past does not have to be all consuming. Gary Clarke critiqued his CCCS colleagues' focus on subcultural style as a unifying category, suggesting that to ignore the diversity as well as the less 'spectacular' participation in subcultures from an ethnographic perspective gives a distorted view of youth culture: 'we are given little sense of what subcultures actually *do*, and we do not know whether their commitment is fulltime or just, say, a weekend phenomenon.' (1990, p.90). Clarke also asserted that the appeal of nostalgia and the role of styles of the past had not been fully explored by the dominant studies of subcultural style. He suggested, with reference specifically to the 'swing' and 'Gatsby' revivals of the early 1970s, 'we need to examine the forms of "popular memory" which pervade society as a whole. The desire to return to a mythical past as a "magical solution" is not restricted to the skinhead subculture' (p.90). In answer to this, while my analysis explores what might labelled 'subcultural' activity, I

come at this from a different angle: not necessarily reading style in terms of the dynamics of subcultural belonging, but relating these activities to the so-called 'mainstream' and, specifically, a broader, circulating popular memory of the 1950s. It is possible to complicate the idea of a simple binary in the relationship between subcultures and the mainstream through exploring how perceptions of the past interweave and permeate a culture in more shared and interchangeable ways than distinct boundaries between culture/subculture allow.

Furthermore, a taste for the aesthetics of the past is not necessarily always nostalgia for the specific content or era that is on display, it can be linked to the processes of popular memory in that it is bound up with *present* concerns and personal identity. From my grandmother's collection I now have a sizable stash of old cookbooks, where a deep emotional and sensual connection to her food and cooking has combined with an interest in cookbooks as a kind of social history – and a grotesque attraction to photographs of food in aspic. In addition, my love for Doris Day films came from the shared family experience rather than just a hankering for the Fifties.[7] I was introduced to Day's films by my mother and watched them repeatedly at home both on my own and with my older sisters. I enjoy re-watching these films because they give me pleasure in the association with a specific feeling of childhood nostalgia and shared cultural experience with my female family members. Despite any feminist reservations about Doris Day's inevitable 'taming' at the end of films such as *Pillow Talk* (1959) and *Lover Come Back* (1961), it was the image of Day as the 'tomboy career girl' (Haskell 1987, p.276) which most caught my

[7] For perceptive insights into the complex relationship between audiences and the cinema/film stars, see Stacey, 1994, Kuhn, 2002 and Moseley, 2002.

imagination and enjoyment (indeed the marriages and births which are 'tacked on' to the end of both films feel somewhat irrelevant to the bulk of the plot). I was also fascinated by the look of the actress' films, with their dazzling fashions, immaculate and vivid interiors – scenes that were so very quaint and different from everyday life in the 1980s; indeed, the Fifties seemed an exotic 'foreign country'.

I use this small, selective personal history to outline the various personal factors that have motivated me to think in basic terms: why does observing and re-enacting the past aesthetically appeal to us? Why might we feel an affinity or 'taste' for the objects from an era through which we never lived? I assert that the enjoyment and participation in what is altogether quite a promiscuous, messy and confusing presentation of the past does not necessarily damage historical knowledge. A 'sense of the past' is formed in combination of contrasting worlds, private and personal, public and mediated. My own interest in certain representations, objects and things of the past has helped me feel situated in a shared, collective past, not in terms of 'facts' but in terms of unleashing a curiosity for the past. From anachronistic remnants left in the present the past becomes both familiar and distant; a 'foreign country' that invites excavation, debate and discovery.

*Methodology and structure*

My intervention into the interdisciplinary landscape of popular memory and our 'sense of the past'– in this case, the idea of 'the Fifties' – is not just to read retro products and lifestyles as 'texts' to be interpreted. I utilise a methodology that brings together evidence of popular memory of the Fifties not only in terms of experience and cultural representations but also through

accounts of those participating in ‘retro’ Fifties revival cultures. Alongside this, I historicise retro as a process of producing popular memory of the past. Raphael Samuel notes that retrochic is a broad phenomenon implicating past and present which seeps into everyday life in many subtle ways:

> Retrochic enjoys an uncertain place in the cartography of taste, making a fugitive appearance in a whole succession of style wars and taking its bow much on the catwalks of the fashion trade, now on the stalls of the flea markets […], now in the installations of pop art. […] Janus-faced, it looks both backwards and forwards in time, using the most up-to-date technologies to age or ‘distress’ what would otherwise appear brand new […]; to re-mix ‘classic’ rock albums or tracks; to recycle archive prints. (1994, p.83)

Because of this broad reach and influence, retro culture is both an obvious source for revealing our ‘sense of the past’ at a certain time whilst also being difficult to analyse and pin down. There are logistic and structural challenges for a study looking at ‘retro’ in terms of the processes and conflicts inherent to the ‘common-sense’ view of the past. This project was in some ways ‘inspired’ by my own sense of the general trend for Fifties retro coming out of cultural revivals, films and TV from the 1980s onwards. However, I have structured the thesis around themes emerging from the primary source material represented by my interviews with Fifties enthusiasts. These individuals are both curators of their own lifestyle as well as history-makers in terms of contributing to what is remembered from the 1950s (particularly in visual culture). Similarly, public commemorative events which looked back to the 1950s emerged when I was nearing the end of my research (such as the Queens Diamond Jubilee and the Festival of Britain 60th Anniversary on the South Bank in London), both illustrating perhaps the topic’s timely nature while also providing rich source material which could not be ignored. A central aim of the project is to explore the ways in which the Fifties are contested through processes of play,

consumption and also creation (attending to those ‘invisible hands’ referred to by Samuel who assist in the social construction of historical knowledge). As such, the project has developed somewhat organically as peoples’ individual responses to my interviews and questionnaires provided new lines of enquiry, while emerging broader cultural events equally offered more ‘public’ narratives of the Fifties to interrogate. The structure of the thesis is a response to this constantly evolving evidence.

Chapter 1 is focused on Raphael Samuel’s notion of ‘re-enactment’ and the popular sense of the past. Retro, particularly those more committed activities of ‘vintage’ lifestyles’ are frequently read as re-enactment of the past, in some extremes as a rejection of the present. In order to explore this fully, I unpick the culture of retro as an expression of Samuel’s idea of ‘living history’. My approach views retro as a kind of ‘bricolage’, taking bits and pieces from the past and assembling them to make new meanings in the present. This juxtaposition can actually lead not to a simple imitation of the past, but a reflexive position on the past and present. I also suggest some potential reasons why the 1950s have become a particularly evocative time in the popular imagination. I analyse the tension between past and present in re-enacting the past through everyday lifestyle choices of ‘dressing up’; collecting lifestyle objects and creating ‘retro’ space, listening to music, dancing and going to themed weekender events. I argue that the imagined activities of the 1950s are adapted for the present and mix with present needs, styles and attitudes. I assert that this symbolic re-enactment is not a rejection of the present but a mechanism of popular memory which not only uses the past for the present but actually also reveals the tension and disjuncture between past and present.

A key part of this chapter is the first-hand accounts of committed Fifties enthusiasts about their cultural choices and how it relates to their idea of the 1950s. Samuel's focus was most certainly on the past as expressed through the eccentric everyday and he called for a democratisation of history to include the role of perhaps more 'lowly' sources of cultural production in past making (such as hobby clubs, the antiques market, and TV programmes). However, he did not specifically engage with first-hand, individual accounts and perceptions of the past and largely focused on broader public, commercial and institutional representations of retro. Hence, in some ways I am taking Samuel's suggestion of history as 'social' even further; my interviews (along with the autobiographical accounts from the Mass Observation Archive) are those individual voices and 'invisible hands' (1994, p17) that Samuel made reference to but omitted to engage with fully in his own study.

I carried out 9 face-to-face interviews selected from 31 people (see appendix 1 and 2 for photographs and demographics) who responded to a questionnaire (see appendix 3). Apart from one or two participants to whom I forwarded the questionnaire through the recommendation of friends, participants in the questionnaire were entirely self-selected. I advertised for respondents via flyers which did not specify any particular group, but asked for people who 'love the 1950s' (see appendix 4). I placed flyers in vintage businesses around Brighton (clothing/antique shops) as well as bars and events such as a 'Brighton Boogie' swing night, the Frockabilly club night and a rock n roll weekender at the Concorde 2 club. I posted physical flyers to a number of UK-based swing dance groups, distributed them at 2010's Vintage at Goodwood Festival and placed an advert in UK Rock Magazine. Virtual

communities have also provided exposure for my project and I found many useful links via the 'Good Rockin' Tonight' on Radio Caroline webpage. I placed adverts on online forums for vintage lifestyle magazines *Milkcow* (now defunct but still operating in 2014 as a Facebook community) and *Vintage Life Magazine*. I also used Facebook extensively to create a network of contacts through joining Fifties-related groups and communities. Brighton in itself is a mecca for retro and vintage lifestyles, boasting many antique and retro clothes shops, but while 23 of my questionnaire respondents were from London or the South East, 8 were not, and included participants from South Wales, Manchester, Cornwall and Suffolk. For my interviewees I chose people who seemed particularly active in terms of shaping the Fifties revival culture scene, such as participating as DJs or clothes dealers, and/or those who covered a wide age and gender range. My interviewees hail primarily from the South of England, due to the majority of questionnaire respondents coming from these areas and were aged between 24 and 66 years old. I used the same rough interview guide for each interview which was put together based on broad themes or issues raised from my questionnaire, sometimes with additional queries to follow up based on an individual's questionnaire answers.

As part of the exploration of this data I implicate some of the so-called 'subcultural' studies work which can be often attributed to communities of style along with notions of distinction which have been attributed to second hand culture more recently by Nicky Gregson and Louise Crewe (2003). While I am influenced by the analysis of style cultures in the tradition of subcultural studies, subcultural labels and boundaries can distract from the broad connections, tensions and relationships between the Fifties-related activities, practices and

perceptions which these communities embody. Indeed, while some of my interviewees made reference to subcultural style groups – various labels such as ted, rocker, biker, hepcat and rockabilly[8] – they did not necessarily easily relate to a particular group. Furthermore, I challenge the notion of 'subcultures' through linking Fifties revival cultures such as ted and rockabilly as part of the 'mainstream' market for retrochic and reviving the past aesthetically in design, pop culture, visual media and fashion.

Chapter 2 discusses popular memory of the 1950s in terms of myths and stereotypes. In many ways popular memory is ideas about the past expressed through vagaries, clichés and easy-packaged myths. Raphael Samuel suggests that popular memory,

> measures change genealogically, in terms of generations rather than centuries, epochs or decades. […] In place of the pedagogues' 'causes' and 'effects' or the scholar's pursuit of origins and climacterics, it deals in broad-brushed contrasts between 'now' and 'then', 'past' and 'present', the new-fangled and the old-fashioned. So far as historical particulars are concerned, it prefers the eccentric to the typical; the sensational to the routine. (1994, p.6)

Samuel highlights the sense that the historical representation of popular memory can be read on the surface as lacking historical complexity, preferring easily understandable and – perhaps – the more entertaining nature of imagining history as a series of contrasting changes, markers, revolutions, extremes and contrasts from one time to another. In this chapter I further utilise my interview material to explore how the Fifties revival frequently expresses popular memory through myths. I use myth because it operates in the realms of

[8] Rockabilly is a particularly popular term for particular Fifties revival cultures. Craig Morrison states that the term derives from 'the combination of the words *rock 'n' roll* and *hillbilly*', pertaining to a musical genre originating in the USA during the 1950s. In his research Morrison interviewed many musicians and producers, one of whom suggested 'rockabilly is also an attitude. The music that expresses that attitude is born of underlying tensions, musical, social and racial.' (1998, p.5).

imagination, fantasy and iconic objects as explored by Karen Armstrong in her analysis of the roots of myth in spiritual and religious legends (2005). I also explore the definition of myth as defined by Roland Barthes because it implicates the shared, common-sense meaning which resonates through a particular object or representation, as is the case with many 'Fifties' mythical symbols and objects such as the 'Fifties housewife' or the perception of post-war community cohesion. Importantly, Barthes attributes a particular politics to the use of myth: that it conveys an ideology which maintains the status quo and reinforces bourgeois values.

However, I suggest that the 1950s are frequently expressed in popular memory through various myths which contradict and counteract one another. The myths I investigate have been teased out of a broad 'Fifties mystique' which is reflected in my interviews as well as representations in popular culture: the particular symbols, objects and qualities associated with the 1950s in a taken-for-granted, shared, popular memory. I firstly examine myths of gender coming through in aspects of how the 1950s are reimagined through the perceived gender roles of the past and clear definitions of masculinity and femininity. I illustrate the ways in which these myths often clash; for example, the idea of the Fifties 'domestic goddess' has been used as a figure of empowerment by Nigella Lawson, but also as a visual symbol of female entrapment in a feminist campaign by The Fawcett Society. Related to this, I analyse the dynamics of 'retro sexuality' and the burlesque revival. Retro style sexual expression and display revolves around contrasting myths of the 1950s as repressive, glamorous, sexy and innocent. The reality of 1950s sexuality is potentially complex and elusive, but myth repackages it for present day

purposes into easily representable totems. Other myths explored of the 1950s include those around community and race; the Fifties becomes both era of fierce community spirit, but also bigotry and racism. Finally, myths of America dominate representations of the Fifties revival, through iconic films, Hollywood film stars, rockabilly music and the image of the teenager. I analyse the selectiveness of myth and why certain myths have prevailed over others, while suggesting that there are elements of self-conscious performance and playing out of myths for the present implicated in the activities of Fifties revivalists.

Chapter 3 focuses on the idea of authenticity. Some of the controversy surrounding the visual representation of the past explored in the first two chapters frequently implicates value judgements based on authenticity (or lack thereof). However, rather than consider authenticity as objective fact, I explore the *processes* and subjective meanings of authenticity through the ways that authenticity is used as a concept for articulating meaning for the individual and community. Again, this is a term which is characterised by tension – sometimes something is valued precisely because it is deemed 'authentic', equally authenticity can be consciously subverted and manipulated. I explore how cultural studies has frequently implicated the dynamic of authenticity, uniting theories of second hand cultures, subcultures, as well as historical study. In particular I counter Fredric Jameson's particular framing of the 'lack of historicity' to postmodern culture, where an increased ability to proliferate images and facsimiles of the past moves us away from any idea of the 'truth' of the past. I suggest that the 'hyper real' and over-exaggerated quality of many nostalgic representations of the past draws attention to their inauthentic nature, juxtaposing past and present and allowing the possibility of subversive subtexts,

critique of the past, and the undermining the idea of historical authenticity itself.

To do this, I explore TV and film representations depicting the 1950s to explore the way that authenticity is played with through notions of camp and pastiche such as in BBC Two's *The Hour* and the films of John Waters. This argument extends further through a discussion of material culture and kitsch where the desirability of certain objects or icons from the past is often increased by a lack of authenticity or of an object purposely taken out of context. To conclude the chapter I introduce material from the Mass Observation Project, from individuals reflecting on memories and images of the 1950s (see appendix 5). Mass Observation correspondence is itself rooted in the perceived 'authenticity' of experience and memory but also revealing authenticity as interchangeable and personal. The MO correspondence reveals authenticity to be negotiated through subjectivities negotiated in relation to emotion, opinion, eccentricities and popular culture. This evidence further teases out the everyday popular memory of the 1950s, as well as the more 'casual' engagement and enjoyment of 'Fifties' representations. Using this evidence to excavate beyond just a textual analysis of common-sense myths and superficialities can reveal more of the conflicts, tensions and meanings at the heart of popular memory of the past. The correspondence also illustrates that in memory as well as the 'imagination' of the Fifties, the meaning of authenticity remains elusive.

My final chapter examines recent commemorations of the 1950s through national heritage. I focus on criticisms of heritage which fuelled debates around the same moment of the broader nostalgic retro revival of the 1950s – the 1970s and 1980s. Writers such as Robert Hewison and Richard Wright

accused heritage of presenting a commodified, conservative and selective version of history in order to cement ideas about the nation and shore up the interests of the elite. Conversely, Raphael Samuel gave heritage a wider potential, suggesting that ordinary people enthusiastic about history created and fed into heritage through hobbies and conservation activities. I explore recent national events in Britain to analyse where Fifties representations fit into the heritage debate. When I began this project, it was in part a response to my own sense of popularity of visual elements of the Fifties in fashion, design and leisure practices.

Nearing the end of my research the 'Southbank Celebrates Festival of Britain' emerged in London during the summer of 2011, celebrating the 60th anniversary of the 1951 Festival of Britain with exhibitions about the original festival and new attractions inspired by it. Furthermore, 2012 culminated in a surge of expression of patriotism and national identity around the twin events of Elizabeth II's Diamond Jubilee and the London Olympics. Many of these events were accompanied by a wealth of themed commodities, expressing the element of heritage which creates history as a lifestyle, something to be bought and sold. However, rather than heritage pushing forward a conservative agenda as Hewison and Wright might suggest, I illustrate that some representations of the Fifties through heritage have allowed for debate, as well as the consideration of meaningful shared histories. I illustrate that heritage is more flexible than heritage pessimists suggest: while it is situated in the world of lifestyle and commodity exchange, it can be used for both conservative and radical politics. In this way, heritage plays into the world of popular memory; while there are pleasures in wallowing in the 'foreign country' of bygone days, from a position of

hindsight heritage (and popular memory) can also be used for present day political agency and change.

## Chapter One: Re-enacting the Fifties

> 'Living history' tells us as much about the present as it does about the past. In the spirit of the age – the here-and-now – it is centrally concerned not with politics or economics, the subjects of yesteryear's grand narratives…but essentially with that great preoccupation of the 'Me' generation: lifestyles. (Samuel, 1994, p.196)

Raphael Samuel's comments on 'living history' above are the starting point for this chapter which explores the idea of resurrecting the past in the present as a kind of 're-enactment'. Writing in the early 1990s, Samuel insightfully links the growing focus of museums on historical domestic and everyday 'lifestyles' with the broader cultural fascination with the past in a panoply of prosaic, everyday ways: design revivals, re-enactment societies, advertisements, retro reproductions, antique shops, the vintage clothing trend, and so on. Samuel relates re-enactment and an idea of living history, describing the increasing popularity of ordinary people exploring 'historical re-enactment' (1994, p.191), dating from 1950s railway preservationists 'dressing up in company livery' (ibid.) and leading to a growing popularity from the 1960s of dressing up in period costume for the purposes of commemoration and education. Thus, the Battle of Hastings is marked with activities including archery and a 'mock invasion by a fleet of sailing dinghies' (p.193). Children begin to learn the 'new history', not of 'great men but rather the record of everyday things' through re-enacting domestic tasks or visiting museums that reconstruct the experience of the Victorian schoolroom (ibid.). As an educational tool, historical re-enactment appears to offer a direct access and connection to the past:

> Objects must be seen and felt and touched if they are not to remain inanimate, and restored to their original habitat, or some lifelike replica of it, if they are to be intelligible in their period setting. Events should

> be re-enacted in such a way as to convey the lived experience of the past. (p.176)

Indeed, re-enactment suggests a faithful imitation or acting out of a past event – a reconstruction that refers to a knowable, static moment of history or place that is posed as 'different to now'. Re-enactment frequently relates to the idea of an authentic facsimile of some scene from the past, as closely as possible. This is particularly apparent when considering re-enactment societies who are committed not only to the excitement and adrenaline of acting out famous historical scenes but also driven by an interest in historical research and education.[9]

From Samuel's account, alongside the development of more social and interactive ways of learning about history there also developed a fascination for lifestyles of the past opening up possibilities for a new generation to revive and embody old styles through the boom in the antique and retro market. This relates to the concept of lifestyles in the late 20th century as a symptom of a freewheeling culture of postmodernity in which individuals are apparently free to pick and choose from a wide variety of options to define the self: 'the new heroes of consumer culture make lifestyle a life project and display their individuality and sense of the style in the particularity of the assemblage of goods, clothes, practices, experiences, appearance and bodily dispositions they design together into a lifestyle' (Featherstone qtd. in Bell/Hollows eds. 2006, p.1). Perhaps the past has become just another fashion to try on?

This chapter aims to challenge the focus on reading objects and style as

[9] Historical research and pedagogy underpins the activities of many groups, for example '17th Century Life and Times', a group which has 'earned its self a high reputation for accuracy, detail, educational value & friendliness.' (17th Century Life and Times website). Equally, 'The Vikings' re-enactment society website prides themselves on their 'renown […] for the high standard of presentation, historical accuracy and attention to detail' and list 'several primary and secondary level teachers' in their midst. (The Vikings website)

just a text, getting beneath surface appearances to explore the practices, politics and meanings of using past styles for individuals and in broader cultural trends. The past/present relationship at the heart of the Fifties revival means that this is neither wholly a passive consumption of market trends, nor a completely 'free' accumulation of random objects. While antique shops and vintage facsimiles provide a wide selection of products to create a Fifties lifestyle, there are certain trends and commonalities in the particular symbols and ephemera being collected. Still, from talking to individuals and analysing the reception of Fifties revival culture, there are many conflicts and tensions in terms of the meaning and interpretation of these objects.

I propose that re-enactment can be linked with the concept of lifestyle, by exploring individuals and broader cultural Fifties re-enactments through lifestyle choices. Evidently, the idea of historical re-enactment reflects and influences popular tastes for and perceptions of the past at any given time. Furthermore, revivals of the past can mean different things at different times. The forthcoming chapters will illustrate that the meaning and politics of the Fifties revival can vary widely depending on the context. Indeed, in this sense, for Samuel as well as for this chapter, re-enactment is not a retreat into the past, but as in Samuel's quotation above, 'tells us as much about the present as it does the past' (1994, p.196). Bringing to life the supposed events and styles of the past, living history 'treats the past as though it was an immediately accessible present, a series of exhibits which can be seen and felt and touched.' (p.197). This preoccupation with reconstructing a more social history can be seen in the more touchy-feely history of re-enactment societies and dressing up through to recent history television programmes in which members

of the public as well as historians immerse themselves in re-enacting lifestyles of the past such as *The 1900 House* (1999)*, The 1940s House* (2002), *The Victorian Farm* (2009), *Turn Back Time: The High Street* (2011), *The Wartime Farm* (2012) and many more. A follow up book to the *Victorian Farm* series, *How To Be A Victorian* (2013), by historian and presenter Ruth Goodman, prompted a review by Matthew Sweet which made reference to the longer history of re-enactment with a medieval tournament for Queen Victoria in 1839. Analysing Goodman's immersion in 'what was it really like to be alive in a different time and place?', Sweet concludes that for all its detail and period garb, 'The history of historical re-enactment offers a forceful lesson: it is a better guide to the preoccupations of the present that the reality of yesterday.' (Sweet, 2013, p.7). However, the question remains as to whether it is ever possible to get to the 'reality of yesterday'. Indeed, this chapter's focus is not to weigh up historical truth against fictional re-enactment but to analyse processes and meanings of playing with various 'yesterdays' in popular revivals and re-enactments.

The particular focus of this chapter will be an exploration of this tension between past and present created by Fifties re-enactments in the context of the present. This relationship is at the heart of Samuel's notion of popular memory and the way that knowledge about the past is constructed. Samuel suggests living history as a kind of 'historical bricolage' (1994, p.173), using the Ironbridge Gorge open air museum as an example of how living history is a complex and contrasting combination of loving preservation, reconstruction and fabrication. I take the act of bricolage in de Certeau's sense of the way that an individual can actively work within a collective culture to build their own

everyday routines, lifestyle and culture through 'innumerable and infinitesimal transformations of and within the dominant cultural economy in order to adapt it to their own interests and their own rules.' (de Certeau, 1988, pxiii). Dick Hebdige has illuminated the idea of bricolage in his depiction of how youth cultures put together styles and objects in incongruous combinations and give them a new meaning (1979). It is frequently the putting together of incongruous elements, old and new, that reveal the past/present tensions in the Fifties revival.

I will analyse the past-present tensions and contradictions that are inherent in individuals' practices of apparently 're-enacting' cultures and lifestyles of the past. I begin unpicking the meaning of retrochic, a term explored in Samuel's study, with its own broad construction through bricolage – retro constructs a version of 'pastness' through the assembly of historical artefacts, memorabilia and random ephemera, ascribing them with new meanings in the present. Resonances of the past combine with lifestyles of the present, vintage originals combine with retro facsimiles; it is the past expressed through subcultural style, alternative culture, as well as the desires and pleasures of the market. I challenge the reception of 'retro' lifestyles which frequently focuses on a notion of 'retreat' and replacing the present with the past, marking it out as a kind of rose-tinted, freakish obsession. Next, I will evaluate how practices of reconstructing, resurrecting or re-enacting the Fifties are an example of Samuel's 'living history' in which everyday styles, objects, originals and copies, are combined in a kind of bricolage within the Fifties revival. I have divided the subsequent sections into different themes and practices in which the past is embodied in the Fifties revival, both in terms of

particularly committed individuals as well as using examples from broader British culture. While re-enactment societies are apparently committed to a particular kind of factual and historical re-enactment, some perceptions of 'vintage lifestyle' revivalists suggest they are always doing the same. Fifties revivalists are frequently viewed as trying to 'go back' to the past in some kind of backward-looking, time-travelling sense, but this chapter will problematise this view.

*Retrochic and 're-enactment'*

To provide the background to this chapter, I will explore the development of a culture of 'retro' which has made the recycling and resurrection of aesthetic aspects of the past desirable. In this section I will discuss the concepts of retro and revival, and historicise the trends that created a market and potential for re-enacting the past. Despite the fact that some of my interviewees would perhaps identify their activities as 'subcultural', I suggest that there is a reciprocal relationship between the general culture/market for 'retro' and the more specific uses of the Fifties in so-called subcultures such as punk and rockabilly. Hence, my discussion will range from the broader 'retro' trends as well as taking in more 'niche' cultural expressions and uses of the past.

Elizabeth Guffey (2006) has offered an analysis of retro focused on a textual analysis of popular culture and design; my approach to retro goes beyond this to include lived experience and participation in retro cultures and how this reveals the processes by which we make meaning in the present through images of the past. Nonetheless, Guffey's study provides useful insights into the history and methods of retro as stylistic practices – for example, noting the influence of Art Nouveau on the typography and illustration of the

American counterculture of the 1960s (Guffey, 2006, p.29). Guffey argues that retro as a term 'acquired its current connotations in the early 1970s.' (p.9). Indeed, whether referred to as 'retro' or 'vintage', since the 1970s there has been a particular intensification in the awareness and reuse of past styles and, I would argue, from 'the Fifties' in particular. Arguably, 'retrochic' became more self-conscious and identifiable in the 1970s, as Raphael Samuel notes the wide range of past styles being imitated in interior design, fashion and other consumables: 'Where the 1950s and 1960s were good at making the old look new, the 1970s and 1980s were no less resourceful at establishing […] 'instant oldness'' (1994, p.77). Samuel attributes the popularity of the country-style kitchen (ibid.) and 're-Victorianized pubs' (p.83) in the late 1980s/early 1990s to the popularity of retrochic. In home design of the 1950s 'Newness was regarded as good in itself, a guarantee of things that were practical and worked' (p.51), while the 1960s and 1970s favoured a more organic turn with the revival of candles, soft textures and floral motifs (p.60).

In a similar way as Samuel's notion of 'living history', retrochic is chiefly concerned with the material and domestic remnants of the past; with a foothold in social history it is obsessed with visual objects. It trades in original artefacts as well as reproduced items which have some kind of hint of past style and can come to symbolise a particular era in the collective imagination. Retrochic is about pleasure and consumption on an intimate level, blurring subcultural/mainstream boundaries, whether through our clothing, leisure pursuits, the music we listen to, or the objects with which we populate our homes. References to the Fifties in particular have played a large part in the retro trend and it is possible to recognise Samuel's depiction of retrochic in the

use of the Fifties since his time of writing.  For example, the clean lines and curves of cutting-edge 1950s design are now reproduced in the form of high-end furniture: Habitat's 'Wilf' occasional table from 2011 with its curved shape and pastel colours or Heal's version of Charles and Ray Eames' 1950 fibreglass chair.

Image 2: Habitat 'Wilf' coffee table, designed by Alison Milner. (image from Alison Milner website)

Image 3: 'Vitra Dar' by Charles and Ray Eames, from Heal's. (image from Heal's website)

The Eames chair, a product resurrected with the look of the original, was re-released in thoroughly contemporary materials: 'In 1993, Vitra discontinued production for ecological reasons, as fibreglass cannot be recycled. Thanks to recent advances in technology and materials, they are now proud to offer the Eames Plastic Chair in the exact same shape, but made of polypropylene.'

(Heal's website).

In this way, retro style makes it possible to embody a kind of 'living history' project through one's own lifestyle. It is frequently so-called subcultures that have made these styles more visible; through community networks they demonstrate a visibly cohesive identity through practices of collecting, leisure and display. Indeed, Samuel acknowledges the specific role of subcultures as a highly visible inspiration for broader cultural uses of retro as he states, 'Retrochic set a whole style for the alternative culture of the 1970s and 1980s' (p.97). In the next section I explore the particular emergence of the 1950s in the context of retrochic and subcultural style, and begin to consider the dynamic between past and present that characterises the Fifties revival.

*Re-enacting the Fifties*

> You know you sometimes see these programmes on TV don't you, there's been a few recently […] wasn't there one about housewives or something, they said that these women lived their entire lives in the 50s or something. And I can't remember who I spoke to, somebody who knew one of the women involved who said that actually she felt a little bit parodied in that, that that isn't what they were saying but they kind of had plucked out these things of what they did and you know, she was sort of saying 'well of course I don't live like that all of the time! Of course I don't use a mangle!' It was sort of…she felt a little bit that it had been sort of turned a little bit: that all they did was make cupcakes and live without any modern appliances whatsoever. (i/v Emma)

The trend for 'retro' in terms of lifestyle construction is frequently recognised by the British media as a kind of time travel, distinctly 'going back' to everyday life of the past where the present is left behind. For example, in the quotation above one of my interviewees Emma was referring to a documentary called *Time Warp Wives* screened on Channel 4 in 2010. The programme featured three women who appeared to be committed to a wholly 'retro' lifestyle from the 1930s to the 1950s. The production company's website described the

programme thus:

> We all find ways to escape the stresses of twenty-first century life. While most people find solace in foreign holidays, exercise or a large glass of wine, some people have found a very different survival strategy: they are retreating into the past. (Maverick TV website)

Similarly, more general reporting on the 21st century Fifties revival has more often focused on a presumed 'reliving' of the past, a journey back to a strange, unknown world of bygone days as a substitute for the present. *The Metro,* in an article entitled 'Why We Party Like It's 1959' highlighted the increase in young peoples' interest in crafts, tea dances and Women's Institute groups pondering: 'Can Jam and Jerusalem really become a replacement for shots of Sambuca on a night out? Apparently so.' (Thistlewaite, 2009, p.14). The article begins with a tone which suggests clear boundaries between the past and present and old and young; the 'wholesome activities' of knitting and afternoon tea are attributed to the 'preoccupation of post-war Britons' and 'a standard weekend for the average 80-year-old'. (ibid.) Still, there is a past-present tension even here, because an idea of the past is not viewed in a vacuum. Lumping together the perceived 'past' activities of craft, dinner dances, burlesque and dressing up in pretty frocks are set up as a binary to the fast pace and lack of meaning in modern life so that 'the over-worked and under-valued are seeking solace in tradition' (Thistlewaite, 2009, p.15). The article cites a psychologist, Dr Colin Gill, who suggests 'Everything we do has become so rushed: taking up an older hobby is a way of getting in touch with ourselves and realising there are more important things in life than just getting the job done.' (ibid.).

However, in conversations with those who demonstrate a large commitment to a Fifties revival lifestyle, there is a lot more going on than a withdrawal from the present. I am not comparing Fifties revivalists or retro style

to the specific museum-like version of historical re-enactment that I explored at the start of this chapter. The popularity of Fifties style is not particularly an interest in the political or economic history of the era (though broad themes and myths of the period still resonate and many are interested in this) but a focus on an expression of the past through aesthetics and lifestyle. However, the broader cultural uses of the 1950s in Britain on television, in design, and rhetoric, are often seen as a kind of 're-enactment' – a 'return' to the politics and styles of yesteryear. I am exploring what happens when objects from the past are brought into the present to construct a lifestyle where past and present meet in a relationship characterised by tension and contradiction. I argue it can be seen that these alleged re-enactments are not so much about escaping to 1950s as about engaging with where we are today. I am challenging the notion that the Fifties revival is necessarily a retreat into a set idea of an authentic past, unrelated to the present.

The debate about the significance of particular Fifties 're-enactments' has a historical trajectory worth exploring here. At various times of revisiting the 1950s there has been a blending of past and present, and recognition of the relationship between the two. The popularity of Fifties style in Britain can be attributed to the era of the intensification of retrochic, from approximately the mid-1970s into the 1980s. This is reflected in the experience of my interviewees as well as broader cultural trends being observed by other commentators. My older interviewees identify the late 1970s and early 1980s as the era in which they got into the music and culture associated with Fifties revival. Some interviewees, such as Dave Fitzgerald (Dave F) and Ralph Whyte (Ralph W), illustrate family connections to the ted and rockabilly scene

which situates the style within a longer history. For example, Ralph W states:

> Well I'd sort of grown up with 50s style around me 'cause my Dad used to play guitar when I was a kid and he used to be in a rock 'n' roll band and he used to play rockabilly. And my mum and dad always used to play early rock 'n' roll on their stereos and stuff, I was always listening to things like Gene Vincent and Elvis, Jerry Lee Lewis, that sort of stuff so kind of grown up with it. (i/v Ralph W)

While 'retrochic' provided an 'alternative style' for the 1980s, for some like Ralph, they grew up with parents already doing it. The broader 'rocker' subcultural revivals of the 1970s – rockabilly and ted – had never really gone away but were even more enabled by the broader cultural revisiting of the 1950s in the 1970s. Indeed, it was thus for my oldest interviewee Tom Ingram, who was born in 1944 and got into rock 'n' roll music around 1958 as a young boy. For him, that ted and 'rocker' culture never went away:

> I was around at the time, sort of thing, I've always been interested in the '50s, music, rock 'n' roll, that sort of thing, that was what I liked. I've always liked it ever since. […] I was a teddy boy I suppose. […] Until about 1969, that's when it sort of made a big comeback […]. There's always been teds around but when these pubs started up I used to go down there…there used to be pubs down Walthamstow…Wood Green, the Fishmongers Arms…
> (i/v Tom)

Still, as Tom illustrates, the broader commercial opportunities and visibility of ted and Fifties revival culture certainly increased in the later 1960s/early 1970s with a 'comeback' visible in broader culture. Within these style choices there is a dialogic interaction between personal choice and subjective experience, and the broader culture enabling Fifties style to be available and desirable.

Arguably, it was not until the late 1960s that the facility to experience the culture or purchase the props of re-enactment of the 1950s was available, or indeed, desirable. As Angela McRobbie notes:

> In the years following the end of World War Two the thriving black markets gradually gave way to the fleamarkets which soon signalled

> only the bleakness of goods discarded. For the generation whose memories had not been blunted altogether by the dizzy rise of post-war consumerism, markets for old clothes and jumble sales in the 1960s remained a terrifying reminder of the stigma of poverty, the shame of ill-fitting clothing, and the fear of disease through infestation, rather like buying a second-hand bed. (1989, p.34)

Nonetheless, subcultural entrepreneurs were soon to pick up on growing trends for time-travelling in popular culture and helped develop a new mainstream desirability for second hand. In America, camp rock 'n' roll revival band Sha Na Na won over a crowd awaiting Jimi Hendrix at Woodstock in 1969, despite the fact that their 'impossibly upbeat and exuberant version of the Fifties seemed the opposite of the arty psychedelia and hard rock that characterized Woodstock.' (Guffey, 2006, p.98). In Britain a year earlier, Bill Haley had performed to a rapturous crowd of fans at London's Royal Albert Hall, many aging teddy boys 'dressed in long 'drape' or leather jackets and narrow trousers and sporting greased hair [seeming] like relics from another era.' (p.101). 1950s music found a wider audience through the re-pressing of previously unavailable rockabilly records (Morrison, 1998, p.185) and in 1972 more than 50,000 fans attended the huge London Rock And Roll Show at Wembley Stadium featuring Chuck Berry, Billy Fury, Bill Haley and Jerry Lee Lewis (Guffey, 2006, p.104).

Retro and vintage shops – now ubiquitous in student towns and larger cities in Britain – began to respond to the taste for the old. Harriet Love opened the shop Vintage Chic in New York in 1965, Granny Takes A Trip in London a year later, selling 'genuine old 'granny shoes', Army redcoats at £3 a time and, as a descriptive guide to 'Swinging London' put it in 1967, 'other historical garments.'' (Samuel, 1994, p.89). Jon Savage attributes the development of punk to a climate of 'retrochic' as he explores the history of 430 King's Road in

London, the eventual site of Malcolm McLaren and fellow punk luminary Vivienne Westwood's famous 'Sex' shop. The shop had been occupied by similarly radical businesses appealing to the willingness to play with the past that emerged in the late 1960s:

> There was one source of a pervasive mood in early seventies pop culture: a mix of camp and infantilism triggered by the hippies' celebration of childhood as the ideal state. Evocations of the thirties environment characteristic of the babyboomer childhood – a process which would peak with that palace of fun, Biba's superstore – went hand in hand with the fine-art codification in 1968 of thirties styles under the term Art Deco. As the sheer drive of pop modernism faltered, the era of decade style-revivals began. Style replaced content; clothing became costume. (Savage, 1991, p.6)

There are echoes of postmodern critiques here (explored further in later chapters), with a suggestion of culture becoming an empty imitation of what has gone before, lacking any kind of weight or meaning, but only interested in surface appearance. In some ways it is possible to trace the emergence of the popularity of Fifties styles – both British and American – through the history of the site at 430 King's Road. On the site from 1969 – 1970 the shop Mr Freedom sold fashions that were 'Influenced by the 1950s, the clothes were trivial, garish and fantastic, pastiching the past thirty years of 'comic-strip, Hollywood vulgar'' (Savage, 1991, p.5). The following business, Paradise Garage, adopted a 'new concept: Pacific exotic […] used jeans, Oshkosh dungarees and Hawaiian shirts. […] the shop front was done in green corrugated iron, with Hawaiian style bamboo lettering and featured an antique petrol pump.' (p.6). Indeed, this Pacific exotic style in the form of Hawaiian or Polynesian 'tiki' style become popular through the 1940s and 1950s in America and has become iconic representations of 1950s revival style – the pink

flamingo, the 'tiki girl' lamp – and clothing – leopard print and bold floral motifs.[10]

On discovering the shop, Malcolm McLaren declared it 'so fifties' (Savage, 1991, p.8) and took it over in 1971 giving it the unashamedly 1950s name: Let It Rock. As Jon Savage explores, McLaren was fascinated 'with fifties Rock 'n' Roll in general and Billy Fury in particular.' (ibid.). I mention McLaren here for his links with the developing punk scene, which despite later denouncing 'anything retro' (Savage, 1991, p.66) had its roots in retrochic and 1950s styles. The shop also tapped into a mass market for 1950s-revival music which emerged in pop during the early 1970s such as 1950s-influenced Showaddywaddy as well as the re-release of rock 'n' roll and rockabilly records. Westwood and McLaren also illustrate the dynamic of the past and present in terms of the importance of *context* to remembering and re-enacting the past. For them, the 1950s in the context of the early 1970s represented an edgy alternative to what they viewed as cosy middle-class hippie politics:

> England wasn't free and easy: it was repressed and horrible. Both felt that the claims of hippie culture to have changed the world were false: it was just window dressing […]. Their solution was to turn, not just to the music, fashion and accoutrements of the 1950s, but to the people who lived out the style: the Teddy boys who, in the early 1970s, were experiencing a resurgence. […] McLaren and Westwood were greatly impressed by the Teds' foppish brutality and their *hard* style, which seemed like a subversion of the status quo. (Savage, 1991, pp.9 - 11)

Raphael Samuel argues that it was the participants of punk who further developed the revival of 1950s styles in particular, with their drainpipes and drapes ironically reviving the styles of the teddy boys who were themselves retro revivalists of Edwardian styles (1994, p.89). From drainpipe trousers to Joe Strummer's quiff, the 1950s was a major influence on alternative cultures in the 1970s and 1980s, as Simon Reynolds notes:

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[10] For more on the iconic nature of 'Tiki style', see Kirsten, 2007.

> During 1977, punk rockers and Teddy boys fought each other on the streets of London. Delinquent but conservative, the Brylcreemed rock 'n' roll revivalists thought punks were pretentious weirdos. [...] Yet rockabilly music and fifties style remained a submerged but crucial component of punk's DNA on both sides of the Atlantic, rising to the surface repeatedly all through the second half of the seventies. (2011, p.303)

The teddy boys combined American gangster suit shapes and the Savile Row styles of 1948 that favoured an 'Edwardian look' but never caught on with their target market (Savage, 1991, p.10). Savage asserts that the mostly working-class boys' appropriation of smart suits was a class challenge: 'in assuming an upper class style, it had the added spice of subtly cocking a snook at its betters'. (1991, p.10).

However, in the ted revival of the 1970s the style was not only being adopted by a broader audience and style culture but it was also gaining multiple meanings. While McLaren and Westwood nostalgically looked back to the teds and rockers of the 1950s, providing costumes for the British nostalgia film *That'll Be The Day* (1973), they found ideological reasons to deviate from a straight-forward ted style. While they focused on the rebellion of the 1950s teds in the context of the 1960s, other aspects of the 1970s ted revival clashed with the couples' ideology:

> Aside from their costume, the Teds were as straight-ahead, rigidly working-class as one could get: bound by tribe to violent dislike of anyone who was different. […] The Teds were as English as meat pies and racism: McLaren and Westwood ate vegetarian food and wouldn't buy South African oranges. (1991, p.50)

Indeed, one can use the appropriation of the idea of the 1950s by McLaren and Westwood to explore the past/present relation in retrochic. In some ways the tensions here are an example of the battleground of popular memory, where class, taste and different ideas about the past collide in a particular context. It is

evident that there are resonances of class and taste about what the re-imagined Fifties represents for different groups. McLaren's fascination with the idea of the 1950s was, in part at least, an entrepreneurial enterprise, spotting a gap in the market for supplying clothing to the second wave of teddy boys who up until then had to have their clothes expensively handmade (Savage, 1991, p.11): 'People wanted winkle-picker shoes and drape jackets and cheesecutter hats and pictures of Rock 'n' Roll stars, and he was digging these things out and then charging quite a lot of money.' (record stallholder Ted Carroll, qtd. in Savage 1991, p.49).

McLaren and Westwood's appreciation for 1950s rock 'n' roll was also highly contextual. They appreciated the apparently edgy, rebellious tone of 1950s rock 'n' roll compared to the rock music of the 1960s: 'Consider the music of the time – then called 'Rock' in a bid for respectability. What a pompous, middle-class facsimile of the anarchy that was fifties Rock 'n' Roll!' (Savage, 1991, p.9). Indeed, the tensions at the heart of the politics of style was again to cause McLaren and Westwood to deviate from their ted inspirations, as these two educated bohemians began to feel the need to distinguish themselves from potentially disagreeable associations, evolving away from teds to 1950s biker styles – with studded jackets and leather – and 'through to the black roots that lay behind [teddy boy style]' – 1940s zoot suits and pegged trousers (Savage, 1991, p.55). This example illustrates the contextual elements that are central to re-enacting styles of the past. In the context of the late 1960s, the 1950s could symbolise both traditionalism, racism, creativity and rebellion. With McLaren and Westwood coming from an art college, bohemian background, it illustrates the frequent focus on the visual in

Fifties revival culture rather than anything particularly culturally or historically specific. Frequently an engagement with the past in everyday life is through myths and visual signs, and using these in the service of today's concerns, or creating an alternative culture for the present. Savage expresses the tensions between past and present inherent in popular memory as he describes McLaren and Westwood's preferred embodiment of Fifties styles as 'reversing into tomorrow' (1991, p.55) – using the Fifties to say something new in the present and for the future.

*Retro and second hand (sub)cultural capital*

The divergence between McLaren and Westwood's apparent love of the 1950s and the ted revivalists' practices and attitudes illustrate the tensions and distinctions that are also an important past/present tension in the Fifties revival. For McLaren and Westwood, there was a very present, arty, rebellious meaning to the mythical Fifties objects they coveted and resurrected in their shops/style. These were ultimately second hand items elevated in desirability both in terms of a potential market (the teds) as well as in terms of imagination, pleasure and as a 'knowing' excavation of the past to service the needs of the present ('hard' 1950s ted style set up against 1960s middle-class 'rock'). As Angela McRobbie explored with the rise of the ragmarket and vintage entrepreneurs in the 1970s and 1980s, there has been a growth in the desirability and possibilities for commodifying the past. Not just in the sense of the ancient antique but, as Samuel explores in the culture of retrochic, the valorisation of more 'recent' second hand items and bric-a-brac, a wider availability of opportunities to construct a 'lifestyle' based on an assembly of everyday items from the past.

Indeed, one of my interviewees Donna, who runs her own vintage

clothes business, observes the development of distinctions between just 'second hand' and the development of the notion of 'vintage' as she got into wearing second hand clothes through the indie music scene of the 1990s:

> I think kind of what went with the territory was shopping in charity shops […]. Bands like [Pulp] were wearing a lot of charity shop stuff and little velvet jackets and things like that. […] I always felt quite unique where I was living before in my hometown in Bracknell, near Reading. […] Not many people dressing in vintage then, or we didn't call it vintage necessarily, it was just second hand shopping.
> (i/v Donna)

She illustrates the continued link between second hand clothes shopping and various 'alternative' music cultures going into the 1990s. Indeed, it not uncommon to find 'retro' or 'vintage' sections in charity shops, where items are set aside often with higher price tags and sometimes extra detail on the price tag explaining the provenance or eBay list price. As Wendy Fonarow has observed of 'indie' music culture, the 'adoption of charity shop items' continues a 'nostalgic principle of indie, in which different periods of resale clothing are renovated and reintroduced as stylish.' (2006, p.45). The aim of this is not necessarily historical authenticity but a disjuncture in the present: 'Indie's clothes typically do not fit – either the person or the time.' (ibid.) Donna further expresses the particular value bestowed on certain items of the past due to their apparent 'quality' or iconic status:

> When I was working in the shop […] people would go 'it's second hand, it should be cheaper' and I just think – this dress is more well made, it's a nicer fabric, no-one else is going to be wearing it and there's something beautiful about the history, knowing that that dress has survived, you know, fifty, sixty years. It's a really lovely thing, you're putting on a piece of history.
> (i/v Donna)

With a lifestyle constructed through styles of the past, the notion of historical value is here deployed as a distinguishing practice from other lifestyle options.

For Donna, mining past styles represents an ‘alternative’ to the present ‘mainstream’ which chimes with retrochic’s roots as an ironic, knowing style embraced by ‘alternative culture’.

The idea of taste and distinction in retrochic also potentially has implications worth exploring in the idea of a kind of ‘subcultural capital’. Studies of the use of past styles have frequently implicated subcultural epistemology (for example, those of the Birmingham Centre for Cultural Studies) and these are helpful for illuminating some of the potential meanings and dynamics of reviving the past stylistically. As Donna attributes a value judgement to vintage clothes over new ones, she is perhaps demonstrating Sarah Thornton’s notion of ‘subcultural capital’, after Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of culture as a set of distinguishing practices related to class and place (1984). Thornton reads Bourdieu thus, that ‘Cultural capital is the lynchpin of a system of distinction in which cultural hierarchies correspond to social ones and people’s tastes are predominantly a marker of class.’ (Thornton, 1995, p.10). She also develops Bourdieu’s move away from *knowledge* as conferring status to the idea of *social capital* developed through class position, social networks and fame so that it’s not ‘*what* you know as *who* you know (and who knows you)’ (ibid.). While Thornton is primarily concerned with how processes of distinction interact *within* subcultures themselves – and these processes are certainly at work within 1950s revival cultures – for now I refer to Thornton to open up the notion of 1950s revival culture as a ‘taste culture’ in a similar manner to her clubbers.

Indeed, lifestyle cultures that revive the past frequently function through dynamics of distinction between past and present, authentic and replica, the rare and the popular. As Gregson and Crewe (2003) have explored in their

study of second hand shopping, there are processes of 'work', research and knowledge going on in relation to certain second hand purchasing. Not always in the interests of thrift, 'retro' clothing which is identifiably 'of the past' rather than just pre-owned has an extra weight of authenticity and history, 'much of the value is located in the imagined histories and biographies of consumption – of who wore this clothing, where, to which (authentic) events and so on.' (Gregson and Crewe, 2003, p.5). Buying second hand also has possibilities for individual distinction because it sometimes imbues the owner with extra knowledge and taste because suitable items have been spotted, identified and sometimes, restored (pp.7 – 8). Ralph Sayers (Ralph S) expressed the idea that there is a distinction between certain vintage items and things that are merely 'second hand' when he states,

> There's certainly a resurgence in 'vintage' stuff. And I'd put the vintage in inverted commas. Because of course, somebody says vintage to me I immediately think 30s/40s/50s. But vintage can mean 70s and 80s to some people can't it. So there are quite a lot of people that 'deal in vintage' or whatever it is, vintage clothing or whatever, when you actually go and have a look you think 'blimey, there's a fine line between old and vintage, and this is just old isn't it?
> (i/v Ralph S)

As Angela McRobbie notes, it is not just anything 'second hand' that will have the desired effect: 'For every single piece rescued and restored, a thousand are consigned to oblivion […] it might also be claimed that in the midst of this there is a thinly-veiled cultural elitism in operation. The sources which are raided for 'new' second-hand ideas are frequently old films, old art photographs, 'great' novels, documentary footage and textual material.' (McRobbie, 1989, p.29). I would argue that these processes of distinction, and perhaps a kind of 'elitism', is evidence of the past/present relation in the practices of the 1950s revival, the meaning of objects from the past are transformed in the present and sometimes

bestow status and knowledge on the collector.

Finally, I do not wish to depict Fifties revival cultures as a homogenous group, though they do have community practices in common with those communities in Thornton's study which are frequently based around issues of authenticity and taste. Like Thornton's clubbers, Fifties enthusiasts often congregate 'on the basis of their shared taste in music, their consumption of common media' and 'embrace their own hierarchies of what is authentic and legitimate in popular culture – embodied understanding of which can make one 'hip'" (Thornton, 1995, p.3). However, I maintain that the tension between subcultures and the so-called mainstream is potentially more of a fluid relationship. My reference to 'Fifties revival cultures' and 'lifestyle' as opposed to 'subcultures' more accurately reflects the overlap and exchange relationship between popular culture and various lifestyle categories and so-called subcultures. Many of the Fifties revivalists I spoke to saw the popularity of Fifties styles as a positive thing, frequently embraced 'retro' replica clothing and objects, and did not seem overly hostile to newcomers. Nonetheless, their conversations around styles of the past were also sometimes expressed dynamically through discourses of 'newcomers' vs veterans on the scene, originals vs replicas, or employing the 'weight' or 'value' of age or history behind their style against the present. I will argue that many of these discussions actually have more to do with the present than the past, and are a way of using nostalgia for present concerns.

*Retro and the Fifties*

The rise of the ragmarket and the growth of antique and vintage shops during the 1960s and 1970s allowed for the popular consumption of objects

from many different eras. As I have argued above, the use of the past in an intimate, domestic sense in terms of dress, fashion and collecting, can be linked with youth cultures and so-called subcultures. On this basis, it can be seen that the recycling of the aesthetic past is frequently those perceived to be mid-century styles of the 1950s and 1960s. Part of this perhaps can be attributed to the visibility and popular cultural resonance of youth culture of the 1950s and 1960s themselves, explored at length by Dick Hebdige (1979). I acknowledge that youth and sub-cultures did not emerge suddenly as part of a post-war 'watershed' but that style gangs, clans and communities are part of a longer continuum, noting, for example, Bill Osgerby's depictions of 19th century 'scuttlers', 'ikey lads' and 'peaky blinders' (1998, p.7). However, Osgerby himself acknowledges a particular increase in the *visibility* of youth in post-war Britain and it is this visibility which is key to the contribution of youth and subcultures to the culture of recycling the past. According to Osgerby, in the first half of the 20th century, various factors such as the definition of adolescence as a separate pre-adult category, the raising of the school leaving age, the rise of production lines and deskilled jobs creating income possibilities for young workers, helped to intensify the possibility for a more coordinated market for culture aimed at and defined in terms of youth (1998, pp.17 - 26).

Hebdige identifies various style groups to the 1950s and 1960s: the jazz-loving 'hipsters' and 'beats', the rock 'n' roll-focused teds, or the mods with their 'apparently conservative suits in respectable colours' and love of soul music (1979, pp.46 – 54). Indeed, the trajectory of 'mod' follows similar lines as rock 'n' roll, rocker and rockabilly cultures in that it was a past style movement recycled in subsequent decades, as Peter York observes:

> Late summer 1976, it happened – the Mod revival. What convinced me was doing a vox pop in the King's Road. […] A lot of them were going to Acme Attractions to buy the sixties warehouse-clearance stuff […] A group called The Jam looked like sharp mass-Mods – French crops, suits and two-tone pointed shoes – and played like early Who. (1983, p.203)

While it would not be the best use of space to go into a debate about what is the most popular decade to revisit, I aim to make the case for the particularly strong and unique visibility of the Fifties in terms of the retro/vintage revival since the 1970s in Britain. More interestingly, one can look at the particular context of remembering to suggest reasons why the Fifties have been called upon as a particularly visible era to revisit in popular culture.

Firstly, the iconic nature of 'the 1950s' can be viewed as part of the packaging of 20th century popular history as 'decades'. According to Jason Scott Smith, the decade is a particular way of packaging history in manageable chunks, defining a period of time – whether approximately 10 years or not – chiefly in terms of the idea of a broadly shared cultural experience or change (1998). For Scott Smith, Frederick Lewis Allen's *Only Yesterday* (1931) was the first major example of this kind of depiction of history, not only defining history in terms of a generation's shared popular culture but also kick-starting the desirability of writing about the relatively recent past in historical terms. Scott Smith is ambivalent about the effects of the decade, suggesting that this kind of periodisation distracts from the nuances of social and economic history (p.277). Acknowledging this concern, my aim with this project is to explore what 'the 1950s' signifies in the symbolic imagination, not merely compare popular imaginings of the past to the 'facts' of history. I am interested in the dynamic of popular memory – that popular perceptions of the past are in fact diverse and contrasting because they are always related to the present. While

reconstructed imagery and re-enactment of the past can at first glance seem selective and picture-perfect, they are produced by and for needs and desires in the present. Hence, the re-enactment of the past is always political not only because of the visible gulf between the imagined 'then' and the present 'now' but also the multiple meanings and use of past styles. As I explored above, when McLaren suggested Paradise Garage was 'so fifties', his love for the era did not help him see eye to eye with the revival teds whose idea of Fifties style did not fit with his bohemian sensibilities. McLaren's taste for the Fifties appears related to the idea of '(sub)cultural capital' in relation to the artful kind of second-hand vintage consumption explored above.

Secondly, the Fifties are particularly associated with the idea of nostalgia. Scott Smith attributes the idea of the decade as emerging around the same time as the meaning of 'nostalgia' developing into a more general yearning for another time:

> Its medical definition, a "condition of acute homesickness," with recognizable physical symptoms, was replaced with a more general meaning of "longing for the past." This latter strain of nostalgia, along with the acceleration in time, figured prominently in the construction of the decade as a unit of historic time. (1998, p.267)

Indeed, representations of the Fifties are frequently associated with a kind of longing nostalgia; Fredric Jameson was motivated to write about the 'nostalgia film' making specific reference to *American Graffiti* (1973) which depicted the kind of 'generational' character of the 1950s and early 1960s which has helped to solidify imagery of the decade in terms of rock 'n' roll, teenagers, and American diners. Indeed, Elizabeth Guffey describes the context of the early 1970s which spawned Fifties nostalgia, quoting an issue of *Life* magazine which suggested 'pop psychologists – and many of the kids – see the flight to the '50s

as a search for a happier time, before drugs, Vietnam and assassination.' (Guffey, 2006, p.112). The association of the Fifties with innocence and optimism is also elaborated by Christine Sprengler who also observes how this impression of the Fifties can be attributed to a 'Baby Boom' generation who contributed to a culture of looking back on their own childhood and adolescence (Sprengler, 2009, p.48). Indeed, during the 1970s there were a number of representations produced in America and Britain which focused on a similar perception of the 1950s in terms of the idea of generations and the 'visibility' of youth culture such as *That'll Be The Day*, *Grease* and the TV series *Happy Days*.

Furthermore, there may be reasons relating to technological developments (whether 'real' or perceived) in terms of image production and reproduction which make particularly vivid ways for the 1950s to be re-imagined. As Christine Sprengler has analysed, 'there is something about the visual, material landscape of the 1950s that facilitated its nostalgic appropriation and cultural resonance' (2009, p.49). Sprengler accounts for the myth-making power of the 1950s to the proliferation of visual cultures such as advertising and television which 'elevated people's consciousness of commodities, enhancing their desirability and reinforcing their various symbolic meanings.' (2009, p.29). The Fifties appear to have a particularly 'aesthetic' focus, a filmic quality and a proliferation of quirky, whimsical objects and details. For example, in response to a Mass Observation Project directive, the 1950s were alternately remembered in black and white or colour, corresponding to family photographs as well as Hollywood films and Technicolor advertisements which have been parodied since. An example is the designs of Anne Taintor that appropriate

images from advertisements from the 1930s – 1950s on everything from notepads to fridge magnets:


Image 4: Anne Taintor fridge magnet (image from Anne Taintor website)

As C2844 (female, aged 43) clarified, she did not experience the 1950s first hand and hence her images are ‘‘remembered’ via photographs and family anecdote, not actual memory.’ Another woman commented, ‘My images of the 50s are very black and white with people wearing big coats with women in long skirts and pointy shoes. I think these images come from our photo album.’ (F2930, aged 44). Another younger correspondent (that is, who did not directly live through the 1950s) suggested ‘They seemed to revel in colour in that era which must have seemed wild and exciting to our parents’ generation after the war torn 40s…Hollywood must have brought dreams and glamour…’ (W2959, female, aged 35). Here again there are those resonances of decades and generational change which Scott Smith identified. I will explore further below how imagery attributed to the 1950s has influenced the re-imagining of the era as well as how past and present tensions can be found within the use of these images.

Finally, the contextual nature of remembering and forgetting can be seen

through the way that Fifties imagery seems to resonate in *specific* contexts. For example, the 20th anniversary of 1951's Festival of Britain passed by without much notice, whereas a growing momentum meant that by 1976 there was a commemorative exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum entitled Tonic To The Nation. The commemoration was carried forward on the crest of a wave of increasing fascination with design and styles of the 1940s and 1950s. This was reflected for example in the fact that Bevis Hillier, one of the authors of the comprehensive Tonic To The Nation exhibition catalogue had previously illustrated his own fondness for 1940s and 1950s style in the design/style book *Austerity/Binge* (1975). Hillier attributed the stylistic Fifties revival to the early 1970s, suggesting, 'There was no doubt that 1972 was to be the year of the Fifties Revival' (1975, p.189). By 1973, 'the Austerity/Binge revival had become too widespread to chronicle minutely […] *Grease* was now on in London, and films such as *That'll Be the Day* and *Let the Good Times Roll* were causing boys to reach for the scissors and Brylcreem.' (Hillier, 1975, p.194). The original Festival had oscillated between myths of the hardship, patriotism and community spirit of World War Two and the promise of fun, fantasy and 'faith in a brighter future' (Lewis, 1978, p.11). Along with youth cultural recycling and popular cultural representations, the idea of heritage of the 1950s was again being appreciated for what the 1950s represented – a story of austerity to affluence. Or Michael Frayn put it, 'The Festival was a rainbow – a brilliant sign riding the tail of the storm and promising fairer weather. It marked the ending of the hungry forties, and the beginning of an altogether easier decade.' (Frayn, 1963, p.351).

Moving into the 1980s, Richard Horn observed the influence of Fifties

styles on late-1970s/early-1980s design in advertising, fashion, lifestyle products and decorative arts in the USA and UK in his design book comparing *Fifties Style Then and Now*:

> It is the eighties, but the fifties live again. Postwar furniture, the latest and hottest entry into the antiques market, is quickly snapped up by private collectors and museums on both sides of the Atlantic. Movies and plays set in the 1950s continue to attract crowds. Many of today's magazines, record albums, and advertisements offer stylish updates of fifties graphics. (Horn, 1985, p.8)

It can be seen that there was a combination of elements happening in tandem to make Fifties style particularly come to the fore in the 1970s and 1980s, in cultural revisiting, youth culture, heritage and consumption. Janice Winship brought these elements together as she explored the potential meaning of the Fifties for the 1980s. Central to Winship's argument, as to mine, is the relationship between the past and the present. Observing the Fifties revival in 1986, motivated by contemporary developments in film and fashion, she cites the musical *Absolute Beginners* (1986) which 'evokes and replays teenage life in fifties London' (1986, p.48). She also critiques prominent Levi Jeans advertisements which, 'draw on fifties American style to re-promote a quintessentially fifties product, no matter that it actually dates from the 19th century…these classic jeans have been this season's hot sellers.' (ibid.). For Winship, Fifties styles in the 1980s were a response to the cultural and political context at that time and specifically, a youth cultural response to disadvantages during the 1980s:

> Post-punk has also coincided with the period of Thatcherism: a world of YTS and the survival of the most competitive, of increased violence and raised nuclear threat. In such a social context fifties myths strike a vulnerable chord. They speak both of possibilities contemporarily denied the young and of problems still experienced today. (p.49)

Crucially though, Winship acknowledges the inherent tensions in popular

memory; she does not view Fifties style as a kind of retreat, but as a more complex site of myth and imagination:

> The 1950s are thought of as a time when it became possible for young people to enjoy themselves before being burdened with adult responsibilities. It was also the time [of] teenage angst and rebellion […] They were the years of optimism, full employment and the beginnings of consumption, but also the time of the Cold War and the H-Bomb. It was a period when a black culture began to make its mark on white British society but also when the first race riots exploded onto the streets of Notting Hill. (ibid.)

I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 2 the specific use of 'Fifties myths' for the service of the present but what Winship's analysis illustrates is that dressing up in period style relates to the present more than the past. The past remains only in terms of the iconic, the symbolic, the cliché and the myth. Past elements combine in 'bricolage' with present ones, creating meaning in the present rather than an interpretation of the past. In reference to *Absolute Beginners* and the infamous Levi advertisement where a young man strips off his jeans in a launderette to the bemusement of onlookers Winship suggests:

> While the surface detail of Absolute Beginners and the Levi ads are fifties, the excess and humour of the performances are very eighties. And no-one, not least young people, is conned into thinking otherwise. The pleasure of the Levi's launderette ad, for example, lies precisely in the gap between what seems to be offered – the nostalgia of fifties decor, the young Elvis look-alike: Nick Kamen seductively stripping, the new sex object. (p.49).

For Winship, 'Back to the fifties' (ibid.) during the 1980s was an expression of 'young people's need both for conformism and rebellion. They are rebels, this time around, with a cause – albeit without a job.' (ibid.) So while reconstructions and revivals of the past evoke national myths of the past, they can actually reveal as much about the present. As such, the use of past styles cannot be divorced from their present context and the individual's (and popular culture's) re-enacting practices are always a response, or compared to, the

present social and cultural state of play.

I have used this section to explore the historical importance of the 1950s within retrochic, and suggest that this is not just nostalgia as a retreat but, as Samuel explores with retrochic and Winship explores with the Fifties revival specifically, a response to the present. My discussion of the historical trajectory of conceptions of 'retro' has illustrated that the use of Fifties styles is not new. By considering the uses of 're-enactment' in different temporal contexts, it can be seen that past styles are frequently more an engagement with the present, not the past. This relationship between the present and past is characterised by tensions and contradictions, something I will explore in the rest of this chapter where I explore case studies of various practices of 're-enacting' the 1950s in the present. In the next section I explore practices and politics of 're-enactment' through the everyday practices and consumption of dress, collecting and leisure.

*Re-enactment and the Fifties: Dressing Up*

> Help us celebrate the Diamond Jubilee by taking a walk back in time to the fabulous fifties, when the Queen first came to the throne. Learn to jive, take part in traditional arts and crafts, see some original memorabilia, or even get a retro make over! Come dressed in your favourite fifties outfit.
> (Visit Brighton website, Brighton Museum event, June 2012)

One of the most popular and obvious ways in which styles of the 1950s have been revived as lifestyles is through the trend for wearing vintage clothes. As I illustrated in my observations above on the development of 'retro', dressing up in period clothing brings together subcultural style, heritage, and the pleasures of consumption. During Queen Elizabeth's Diamond Jubilee in 2012, heritage organisations frequently looked back to her Coronation with 1950s-themed events, such as the event mentioned above at Brighton Museum in

June 2012. I assisted with a reminiscences session as part of this event, and the programme was a mixture of artefacts, memory, re-enactment and media. Participants were invited to 'come dressed in your favourite Fifties outfit' and of course those helping at the event got into the spirit – I wore a black and white polka dot A-line dress, obligatory red lipstick, a Fifties revival bunting necklace by *Tatty Divine* and a Festival of Britain pin badge:

Image 5: Stella Sims and historian Sarah Tobias, Brighton Museum 'Back To The Fifties', 2 June 2012 (photograph courtesy of Paula Wrightson, Royal Pavilion and Museums, Brighton and Hove City Council).

Apart from the badge, none of the outfit dated from the 1950s, having all been variously accumulated from the British high street or in the case of the necklace, from the Southbank Centre shop during the 2012 Festival of Britain anniversary celebrations in London. This in itself illustrates the ease with which a reconstructed past can supplement a 'real' one and the ways in which Fifties style has seeped into the market for fashion. I will explore further in Chapter 4 the role of popular memory and the 1950s in terms of the idea of national

heritage, but I use this example here to illustrate the relationship between fashion and dressing up in popular culture as well as more institutional explorations of history. I will explore how re-enacting the past has become a method of popularising history and that this is frequently focused on the relationship between the perceived past and the present.

Angela McRobbie has analysed the role of second hand shopping and historical styles on fashion. While ragmarkets may have been superseded by exclusive vintage boutiques and vintage-copyists *Urban Outfitters*, the popularity of vintage and Fifties styles has not gone away. McRobbie acknowledges that by re-enacting past lifestyles, the wearer is exhibiting a literacy or at least, literacy by association, in popular culture, trends and history:

> Mainstream fashion has a lot to thank youth subcultures for. It can gesture back in time knowing that its readers have been well educated, through the media, in post-war pop culture history.
> (McRobbie, 1989, p.39)

As McRobbie has elsewhere explored, in some ways design students interested in vintage styles – potentially educated in the literature of subcultural style – brought them into the fashion mainstream throughout the 1980s and 1990s (McRobbie, 1998). She notes that British fashion particularly has roots in historical styles, 'raiding the second-hand clothes shops, and poring through old magazines for a new 'old' look' (1998, p.8). Indeed, in 2004 the *Guardian* newspaper reported on John Galliano's catwalk show which played with Fifties styles:

> For next season fashion's love affair with the 1950s is no longer just full skirts and Audrey Hepburn. Quiffs, teddy boys and rockabillies are de rigueur. Why, Dolce & Gabbana even hired Elvis Presley's granddaughter to star in their Milan show last week […] John Galliano's rockabilly influenced collection for Christian Dior, right, may look ridiculous but he is often a few steps ahead of trends. Six-inch quiffs and brightly coloured lace-up shoes may never make it off the catwalk,

> but the outsize man's tailoring with exaggerated shoulders could. ('Trendwatch Rockabilly Chic', 2004, p.8).

The internet has increased the proliferation of both authentic and vintage copies, making it easier to access those fashion items not so readily available in high street stores. Vintage items – and copies – can be easily sought on auction-site eBay[11] and on internet shopping sites such as What Katie Did where it is possible to purchase reproduction vintage underwear including bullet bras, corsets and stockings. Reproduction circle skirt dresses with frilly petticoats are available from the website or Camden shop of Vivien of Holloway, along with a range of other reproduction clothing from the 1940s and 1950s.

McRobbie directly linked the popularity of vintage fashion to post-war subcultures, both in terms of subcultures defining what is 'cool' but also aiding development of an entrepreneurial framework around subcultural consumption leading from the 'ragmarket' to the more specialist vintage boutique (1989, p.34). In tandem with this entrepreneurial spirit was the class and gender politics tied up in the meaning of wearing second hand clothes in different contexts. For example, the hippy preferences for second hand 'fur coats, crepe dresses and army great coats' (p.34) may have shocked the previous generation with their 'stigma of poverty' (ibid.) but they reflected the taste for recalling a bygone age when 'craft values still prevailed' (ibid.) as opposed to the 'man-made synthetic materials found in high street fashion.' (ibid.). In a similar way, reports McRobbie, 'beat' girls and women in 1950s New York searched out 1930s and 1940s silk and satin garments which 'worn in the mid-

[11] A search made on 22/05/14 at www.ebay.co.uk under the terms 'vintage dress' yielded 179,574 results. It is notable that a scroll through these results shows many dresses that are actually brand new and in a variety of styles, the sellers including the word 'vintage' in their listings, apparently aiming to get maximum views of their articles through the popularity of searches including this word.

1950s […] issued a strong sexual challenge to the spick and span gingham-clad domesticity of the moment.' (ibid.). Not only does wearing past styles embody, whether knowing or unknowingly, political statements when taken out of context they also illustrate a position of distinction in the wearer; visible embodied evidence of a literacy in popular culture history and the potential for using anachronistic style as ironic subversion.

*Dressing up and 'going back'*

The anachronistic aspect of wearing past styles in the present creates tension between representations of the past and the role of the present. Is an 'authentic' past look important or not? For some of my interviewees, wearing 1950s clothes is one of their central interests in re-enacting the past. In some ways, the focus on dress is all about the past and an adherence to whatever notion of authenticity the individual wearer – or that broader popular cultural memory – feels to be true. Music and material culture in the form of clothing, furniture and artefacts form the main focus of Fifties enthusiasts. Donna reflects the trend of many of my interviewees when she states, 'It's mainly a visual thing for me. Not just the clothes but the furniture and everything too.' (i/v Donna). For Dave F, his involvement in the Fifties scene meant that for him the 1950s is symbolised by 'clothing style and friendship' (i/v Dave F). Allen and Donna own their own vintage clothing businesses (Hellcatz Clothing/Bobby and Dandy respectively) and Allen notes the development of the vintage market in Stoke Newington in North London where he lives:

> There's a lot of what I call the trendies, the trendy people, 'specially around here, in the last year and a half there's been five vintage shops open on our high street. Five vintage shops. Four selling clothes and one selling furniture. (i/v Allen)

Dressing the part is important and one of the key ways that Fifties style is visible

in social life. Firstly, I will explore how appearance and clothing resonates with an 'authentic' sense of the past for the Fifties revival in the sense of apparently 'going back' to or excavating some idea of a distinct bygone time.

The reaction that many Fifties enthusiasts receive from other people helps create the notion that they represent a total disjunction from the present, their anachronistic sight on the present-day public sphere representing some kind of 'blast from the past'. Sometimes the way Fifties enthusiasts are perceived are as a direct link to the past, such as Verity's experience:

> There's sort of three things that normally happens. You either get shouted at […], it's like 'oh you look like Marilyn Monroe' […]. And then the second one is, 'are you going to a fancy dress party?' […] The third one's the nan's clothing, I knew there was a third bad one. Yeah, 'oh you look like my nan!' […] I am a target for old gentlemen. Which I love, if I'm on the bus you know, I absolutely adore it I think it's so sweet. And he'll be like 'I'm really sorry to bother you but, it's just, I could close my eyes and feel like I'm 19 again. (i/v Verity)

This suggests that observers experience a kind of time travel when witnessing the apparent embodiment of the past in the everyday sphere of ordinary life. This is a similar interpretation as the *Time Warp Wives* documentary, there is the idea that people who embody styles of the past are somehow in retreat or escape from the present, very much associated with a separate alternative historical time.

Another aspect where the specificity of history and the past becomes important in re-enacting the Fifties is the role that 'authentic' clothing plays in giving value and enjoyment to the Fifties revival. For example, Ralph W, a big fan of rockabilly music and record collecting who occasionally DJs at club nights, does not consider himself so much of an enthusiast for 1950s clothing but acknowledges the relationship of the style with the Fifties revival scene:

> If you're into the music you tend to be into the look, you tend to be into

> the clothes, the hairstyles as well, you know, that's obviously another major part of the scene, I think most blokes even if their hair is virtually falling out they still try and have a quiff even if they can't! (i/v Ralph W)

When I interviewed Ralph he had the requisite quiff, wore a t-shirt with the logo of a hot-rod workshop and 'selvedge' jeans. Ralph refers to selvedge jeans as being popular on the rockabilly scene, 'having, you know, the red stitching on the jeans […]. Little things like that, people can be quite picky about really.' (i/v Ralph W). Worn turned up with the 'selvedge' on show, this particular hallmark adds vintage credentials to the garment as it references traditional, methods of producing denim. According to denim website Rawr Denim:

> The history behind Selvedge Denim […] begins with the old style loom being born in the late 1800s. It was able to produce tightly woven and heavier denim in strips that were quite narrow but very long. In fact, the denim was so narrow that in order to maximize use of the denim, the jean manufacturer had to weave fabric all the way to edges, which were consequently bound. The "self-edge" would be done in various colours (red being the most common), a practice fabric mills follow to differentiate between fabrics. […] However, in order for the jean manufacturers (e.g. Levi's, Lee) to keep up with the ever increasing denim demand in the 1950′s, they switched to the projectile loom – a machine which could produce wider denim for less cost – giving the end consumer a cheaper and lower quality pair of jeans. (Coe, 2011)

Hence, there is an association of selvedge jeans with a more quality product which has taken more effort and time to produce through historical, traditional methods. There are two important aspects here which relate to the idea of the past. This first connects to the idea of 'second hand culture' which I explored above in the sense of the 'work' that goes into selecting and finding particular items which then bestow value on the wearer. For example, even though he notes it is now possible to purchase (and he is happy to wear) 'repro' selvedge jeans, Ralph notes that originals convey a high price tag and a certain care to preserve them: 'people will spend hundreds of pounds on vintage denim selvedge Levi's and stuff and quite often they tend not to wash them […], they

tend to *Febreze* them and stuff like that because […] a lot of selvedge jeans tend to lose their dye and colour very very quickly.' (i/v Ralph W). The second aspect of this correlates to the broader culture of craft and a return to apparent 'tradition' in the face of the perceived increasing pace of life. There is a sense that selvedge jeans – or second hand clothes in general – are a direct connection to a time when tradition, care and quality was imagined to be more of a priority in the manufacture of clothing and goods. Even in the case of imitations, such as in the case of reproduction selvedge jeans, these styles still carry some of that value and quality to the wearer in even when they are merely copying the surface appearance of the style without the 'work'. The suggested expense and effort required to produce selvedge denim is still carried forward in the visual symbol of its signature hem which brings with it ideas about quality and tradition.

*Dressing up and the dynamics of authenticity*

Ideas about historical provenance, authenticity and calling up old social values and behaviours are bound up with the Fifties revival. Still, I maintain that what they reveal about the relationship between past and present is far more significant than the association with historical re-enactment suggests. Authenticity is used as a symbolic return *for the present* to imagined ideas of quality and tradition. For example, making one's own clothes is a particularly effective way to obtain an authentic 1950s outfit such as for Karen who states 'I'll see a piece of clothing on a blog or in a film and will immediately start looking for vintage patterns in order to reproduce it for myself.' (Karen q/r). Seemingly reflecting a bygone age, it is actually often through discussions of 'craft' that a more profitable dialogue comes up regarding the way that these

pastimes service the present. As discussed in *The Metro* article, a psychologist is quoted, 'Most of us are office-based with very little practical work to do who rarely get to see an end product, so there's great appeal in using your hands and finishing something.' (Thistlewaite, 2009). Rather than being a passive rejection of the present, the idea of craft and imagined tradition also relates to present day concerns about mass production, over-consumption, and waste.[12] Donna explores what revival culture can signify for the present:

> I mean, people would argue nowadays [the appeal of the 1950s] is to do with the economic climate as well...recycling materials, not wasting things [...] I do care about the environment and the world so it does go in with that but that wasn't initially why I was into it. But now it does kind of make sense and obviously, as I said earlier, I was on a budget when I was younger so it did, it did make sense then for the same reasons that maybe it makes sense for people now. (i/v Donna)

Donna's interest in second hand shopping can be viewed not only as an interest in past styles but also an engagement with thoroughly present economic and environment issues. I will explore later how an interest in the 1950s specifically interacts with concerns about the 'new austerity' in Britain in the early 21st century, when I discuss myths of the Fifties and heritage. Donna's interest in second hand shopping can also be viewed as a combination of an interest in past styles along with a concern for thoroughly 21st century economic and environmental issues. However, while Ralph is content to wear 'repro' selvedge jeans, in other discussions it was clear that the sense of an 'authentic' look and attention to historical detail is important in dress. From this, it would be easy to interpret the Fifties revival as being heavily invested in some kind of past separate and preferable to the present. However, what in fact begins to emerge

[12] Indeed, the use of craft and DIY has been utilised not only to address concerns about waste but also in other subversive and activist ways in the development of so-called 'craftism' explored by numerous chapters in Buszek ed., 2011.

is a central tension: the idea of an ‘authentic’ 1950s style is not so much about a return to the past, but about the relevance and meaning of the past in combination with the present.

As I outlined in the broader context of the bohemian use of the Fifties in the early development of punk, in a similar way my interviewees illustrate the elements of selectivity and divergence in taste and Fifties styles, depending on the context. Much of this circulates around ideas about what is ‘authentic’ in terms of the choices of clothing or objects that are chosen to make up the lifestyle. For example, Dave Penny (Dave P) discusses the distinctions between the 1970s Ted revival look and what he called his ‘hepcat’ look:

> The teddy boy culture at the time had sort of moved on […] and instead of them all looking smart in their black drapes with black velvet, you were getting pink drapes, you were getting powder blue drapes, and to me that looked ridiculous you know. My dad was, he wasn’t a teddy boy, he was a teenager in the 50s and he dressed in a suit and all the photos I've got of him at the wedding and stuff like that, his hair was cut nicely and he always wore a good suit and a tie. […] it really was all about authenticity with me and my friends you know. (i/v Dave P)

Dave P here attributes a historical provenance to his style in the 1970s, as opposed to the ‘ridiculous’ ted fashions which are seen to be a perversion of ‘authentic’ styles taken from old photographs.

Furthermore, there is a tension between looking the part and appearing as if one is in ‘fancy dress’, as Verity observes above in some of the comments she receives on her appearance. Some of this relates to the point of the ‘work’ of dressing up in vintage styles – it asserts dressing vintage as a way of life rather than just as a hobby or as just another style trend to try. For example, designer Wayne Hemingway has turned himself into something of a vintage guru, developing his ‘Vintage’ brand with numerous festivals and events, as well as lifestyle products. I will discuss the festivals further in Chapter 4, but the

focus of the launch of the vintage strand of Hemingway's business began in 2010 with the Vintage at Goodwood Festival in West Sussex. The festival was promiscuous in its time-travelling, focusing on many 20th century decades, notably starting with the 1920s, fitting with Jason Scott Smith's suggestion above that the era particularly helped solidify the past as an easily commodified 'chunk' of unified cultural experience. The focus was primarily aesthetic: it was about visual glamour, the past as a plaything and inspiration for the present:

> Vintage Festival is a sensual delight, a big dressing-up box, a collector's dream and a joyous creative feast for all ages. For one glamorous weekend we celebrate the music, fashion, film, art, design and dance from the 1920s to the 1980s that has made Britain the world's creative and cultural hot bed. (Hemingway Design website)

In relation to this, Donna makes reference to the reaction to the festival of some of her friends who are more committed to vintage dressing. The event attracted 50,000 people and she commented, 'I had some friends there that said they didn't like the fact that there were people not dressed up and were just wearing a token curly wig or Elvis glasses or something.' (i/v Donna). Again, this seems to differentiate vintage dressing as something involving commitment or effort, rather than just 'dressing up' for the weekend. While this may suggest that authenticity and commitment to the past is important to those wearing vintage styles, I assert that these styles have more resonance and meaning in the present than actually saying anything about the past.

There are contradictions in terms of what authenticity means to the Fifties revival which I will explore in more depth later in Chapter 3. In terms of my interviewees and their dress, authentic or original items of clothing were valued, but so were other reproduction items, so long as they looked

appropriate. For example, strict adherence to a historically accurate 1950s is not important for Dave F:

> Upstairs I have drapes, I also have Italian box jackets. I've got a lot of the 40s style trousers and jackets and all. Because I was very much into what they call the 'rockabilly scene' which was the raw rock 'n' roll. […] I dress to please myself. I like the style and I'm not afraid of mixing and matching it. (i/v Dave F)

As I have noted, it is now possible to purchase replica period styles via a proliferation of online markets, among others, but Dave F is sanguine about this:

> Prefer the original stuff, I mean a lot of the original stuff, the cut's different, there's certain bits about the style that you wouldn't pick up on shall we say 'replicas' nowadays. But saying that, some of the replica stuff that is out there is very closely styled on the original fifties, so basically you're getting a new jacket in the same style that they used to have. (i/v Dave F)

Emma is also happy to admit that 'Hardly anything I have is actually vintage, I might have the odd tie or cravat or bit of jewellery or something but, most of what I wear is stuff that you can buy now'. Indeed, while many Fifties revivalists place a value on truly vintage items, they are frequently not purist about mixing it with more accessible imitations. Authenticity is clearly a subjective thing, with mostly an emphasis on 'feeling good' or 'looking the part', even if this might be anachronistic, as Dave continues: 'Cause you can't even say there's any right way to look, you know. You dress as you feel comfortable and, I mean, most of the time you do look the part anyway.' (i/v Dave F).

*Dressing up and 'being different'*

There is another point which illustrates the past/present relationship acting as a tension within the Fifties revival, also highlighted by Verity's experience on the bus above. If Verity was actually living in the 1950s as she imagines it, her appearance would never attract as much attention as it does in

the context of the average bus or high street of the 21st century. By mining fashion history, it is possible to gain a distinctive, smart look in opposition to present high street trends, and there is an element of pleasure in using past looks for this purpose. The sense that Verity looks different in the present is an important aspect of the style, as she describes how she contrasts with other parents at her son's school:

> All the people at school think I'm absolutely mental when I do the school run, I turn up in big dresses and sun hats. But they all love it, you know, they think it's great and on fetes I take real homemade cakes in and you know, spend hours decorating them and things like that, they all think it's great. (i/v Verity)

Despite being more interested in 1930s and 1940s styles in his older years, Ralph S demonstrates in a similar sense to Verity, the use of past styles as looking distinctive in the present, in his case to look 'smart':

> When you're in your thirties and forties perhaps you have to dress in a slightly more mature way and your only way to show 'I've got a style and I've got a fashion' is easier in forties and thirties style […] a nice bright tie, a double breasted suit or trousers with turn-ups or whatever it is. Trying to look smart. […] it gives you an opportunity to be a bit different and people say 'oh look at him'. (i/v Ralph S)

Therefore, it can be seen that dressing up, along with other practices of 're-enacting the 1950s', is a reaction to the present rather than a simple hankering for the past. As I explored above, this can be traced historically through various incarnations of the Fifties since the late 1960s.

As I argued above, McLaren and Westwood 'reclaimed' the idea of rebellious rock n' roll from what they saw as complacent 'hippy' music. Indeed, in many ways for my respondents, the Fifties represent an 'alternative' culture which offers a break from modern popular culture. For example, as mentioned above, Donna got into wearing second hand clothes through the UK indie music scene and makes the link between alternative cultures and Fifties style:

> I was a real goth type girl when I was younger […]. And a lot of people that used to be purely looking like a goth or a punk are gradually looking more rockabilly or more fifties. I suppose they're all quite bold looks. And they're a bit off kilter. (i/v Donna)

The off-kilter, out-of-time type effect that vintage clothes create is a break from the norm perhaps, but still that norm is only measurable through whatever other *present* trends are popular. Ralph S has moved from being involved in the Fifties rockabilly scene, to more 1930s/1940s styles and communities focused around swing and lindy hop dancing as opposed to rock 'n' roll and jive. This in itself pertinently illustrates the tensions at the heart of a revival of past styles – on the one hand there are frameworks of 'authenticity' and on the other the appeal of the past as a treasure trove of alternative lifestyles waiting to be tried on. Ralph S is relevant here because as a younger man it was the Fifties rockabilly revival which first attracted him to styles of the past:

> I was born in 1965 so I was really too young for punk, punk was a bit frightening in a way I suppose. And then the next sort of teenag-ey music that came along was in the […] late 1970s, early 1980s, when there seemed to be a resurgence in rockabilly and there were lots of rockabilly bands that got into the charts. […] rock 'n' roll and rockabilly was a rebellious music then, those bands that recreated that style did it with a bit of a punk edge. A slight element, not of aggression exactly but they played a bit faster, they played a bit louder. So that gave me I suppose at that age my rebellious music that I was looking for. (i/v Ralph S)

So in the context of Ralph as a teenager, Fifties styles and rockabilly music answered the need for something that was 'my opportunity for teenage rebellion' but different to punk in the late 1970s. As he got older his tastes changed to a style which more fitted his age (in order to 'have a style') but was similarly distinctive in its practice of reviving past styles in the present.

The 1970s and 1980s were key times for many of my older correspondents getting into the Fifties scene and this context is worth exploring.

As I explored above, while there was arguably a more everyday culture of 'retrochic' visible from the 1960s onwards, the relevance of the Fifties in particular seemed to come into its own during the mid-1970s and through the 1970s and 1980s was influential in alternative styles, fashion and popular culture. Janice Winship made the link between punk and alternative 'retro' cultures during the 1980s and this can be seen not only because punk had its own Fifties elements which I explored above, but also in the fact that punk created a prominent style based on disjuncture, irony, and bricolage/mixing up, or as Winship puts it 'laid the basis for diaspora of style', making it 'no longer clear that a look was what, superficially, it purported to be.' (1986, p.49). The Fifties as an alternative culture in a different context, is taken up by Emma, who not only got into the Fifties revival through her mother's love of jive dancing and Elvis but through music of the 1980s:

> I absolutely loved The Smiths […] so I was always into their music from the first single in '82 or whatever and they were always very influenced by fifties culture. […] He had the quiff, he had, all the photos on their album covers were from, the sort of pictures of Truman Capote, pictures of old Coronation Street characters you know, and stuff like that - all very 60s and 50s stuff and a picture of Elvis on one of them […]. So I'd go back and kind of look about what that was that he was talking about and *why* would he put a young Elvis on the cover and what does that mean? (i/v Emma)

Emma illustrates the way popular culture of the 1980s utilised popular culture of 1950s and 1960s in aesthetic terms, bringing together unique, contradictory combinations. In this case example, The Smiths brought together a guitar-based melancholic sound with nostalgic images from the more traditional canon of British and American popular cultural history. The Smiths also made specific reference to post-war British culture; for example, with lyrics influenced by playwright Shelagh Delaney and the video for *The Queen Is Dead* featuring a

collage ‘a young ‘boy’ dressed in the archaic costume of a 1950s childhood, the short trousers, and ‘short back and sides’ haircut designed to mark the ‘hims’ off from the ‘hers’ […] A close-up reveals the ‘boy’ is a young woman’ (Hebdige 1992, pp.366 – 367). In Dick Hebdige’s close reading of Derek Jarman’s video for *The Queen Is Dead*, black and white footage of a church spire moves him to comment how ‘a lot has changed in fifty years, not least the consciousness of time itself: the past has become a reservoir of signifiers to be tapped, consumed, like the London water supply.’ (1992, p.366). Hebdige suggests the video is a kind of ‘camp allegory’: ‘the debunking intention self-consciously ‘critical’ and ‘anti-patriotic’. It sets out to expose the vanity of national pretensions to either ‘unity’ or ‘greatness’ by celebrating the repressed or excluded social, sexual and semantic margins – the bits that do not fit into the preferred narratives of Englishness.’ (p.368). The use of symbols from the past which signify ‘Britishness’ are here juxtaposed in certain ironic ways that do not allow for a straightforward picture of Britishness or history. It also relates to Winship’s analysis of the role of images of the past being used in a new context to critique the present.

This perhaps links with the idea of Fifties looks taken by Ralph S and Emma as being associated with something marginal and edgy, or as an alternative to other contemporary cultural options which are seen as deficient. Dressing up in Fifties styles and taking part in the collective culture of the Fifties scene provides an alternative to other contemporary scenes, whether it is punk that’s a little bit too hard, or a broadly defined commercial gay culture that does not cater to your tastes, as Emma states:

> I just wanted something different, that was different particularly to the mainstream gay scene because the mainstream gay scene ‘it says

> nothing to me about my life', as Morrissey would say, and it's just brightly coloured bars all modern, playing shit music and or having really shit cabaret. (i/v Emma)

Just as Winship observed Fifties style in the 1980s in visual culture in such a noticeable way that it enabled Richard Horn to write his book comparing 'Fifties Style Then and Now', Emma also observed the more broad trend for Fifties-influenced clothing in the 1980s: 'there was a real [fifties] influence on the style, the sort of high-waisted trousers and the pencil skirt, and there was a whole load of stuff and even glasses like this [heavy plastic framed] but bigger 'cause it was the '80s so they sort of did everything bigger but a lot of it was really influenced by it.' (i/v Emma).

Finally, as I have illustrated above in terms of the Fifties revival being a kind of 'alternative culture', there are other ways that dressing up in 1950s clothes is experienced and utilised in terms of defining identity in the present. In terms of gender identity, Fifties style is embodied as a way for women in the present to look, a reaction against contemporary fashions which are seen as unflattering. One of my questionnaire respondents reflected this when she commented 'What is more attractive, bulging hips oozing out over skin tight jeans and a skinny t-shirt showing every lump or bump, or Monroe style western fitted jeans with a fitted blouse, accentuating womanly curves without revealing everything?' (q/r Mary). Donna also reflected the idea that dressing in Fifties styles can make one feel unique and even though she admitted 'it's become a fashion I suppose', she maintained the value of Fifties styles is that 'you can get a really amazing quality dress for the same price or less than something at the high street and no-one else is wearing it.' (i/v Donna). Again, here the dynamics of vintage second-hand shopping – the 'work' of finding a unique

garment, as well as the quality of the garment itself – adds value to the wearer in the present. On a personal level, dressing up in vintage clothes also relates to the self-esteem and sense of personal style, 'feeling good' about how one looks:

> I realised my figure […] maybe more suited 50s shapes better […] I think women love getting dressed up for a night out, and looking good. […] Personally, putting on some heels and wearing a dress and putting on makeup I feel good. (i/v Donna)

This is not just a retreat to the past for a sense of comfort or nostalgia, but a way an embodying past styles to enhance ones uniqueness and appearance against present trends. It is a way of differentiating oneself from the mainstream female glamour. In 2003, a self-confessed 'rockabilly chick' wrote an account of rockabilly where she acknowledged that the look is high maintenance: 'Rockabillies are porcelain-white with eyebrows shaved off and penciled back in to create a permanently surprised expression…Lips are pillar-box red and these ladies know how to sport a wiggle when they walk.' (Wills 2003, p.18). However, she positions this look in opposition to her perception of the 'mainstream' at the time: 'Cat Deeley-esque[13] poker-straight hair, St Tropez tan and trendy clobber.' (ibid.). However, while certain Fifties revival cultures have elements of uniform, recognisable garments (such as rockabilly selvedge jeans or the ted drape suit), in many ways participants in Fifties revival cultures enjoy mixing styles to create a certain distinctive look. And, fundamentally, it is done for enjoyment, not as a history project: 'I just have a mish mash of all different things that I am just drawn to and then I put them together in different

[13] Now a successful television presenter in the USA, Cat Deeley was a regular face on British television from the late 1990s through the 2000s, beginning her career on the British Saturday morning children's TV programme *SM:TV* (Horkins, 2013). Here she is referenced as representing aspirational 'everywoman' glamour.

ways and it's always a bit of fun, you know? […] I don't think I'm that purist.' (i/v Donna)

Indeed, using past styles also frequently leads to questioning of boundaries around clothing and individuality. For example, Sarah answered my questionnaire, describing her style as 'I was a gothic. I have amalgamated both looks to become more unique; I prefer to look different and stand out from the crowd. I find "normal" people boring to look at. I have tattoos and piercings and a massive quiff when I am dressed up.' (Sarah q/r). This blending of such styles may seem surprising; the effect of combining looks from the past creates a disjuncture with the past which opens up not a reflection on the past, but on the past-present relation. What questions are we asking about the past when we mix and match period dress? What myths are we undermining from the past when styles are both apparently 'authentically' and promiscuously deployed? And what are we trying to say about the present when people use styles of the past? This section has opened up some possible answers to these questions and the forthcoming sections on other practices of style in terms of leisure and collecting will further unpick the meanings of the use of 1950s re-enactment and how it reflects the past-present relation and the contradictions and tensions at the heart of this.

*Re-living the Fifties through lifestyle and leisure*

As Raphael Samuel finds in the quotation that opens this chapter, the kind of living history that recreates the homes, streets and costumes of the past, such as the Black Country Museum in Dudley (1994, p.181) reflects the growing fascination with *lifestyles* of the past as history. For Samuel, this particular addition of lifestyles to the study of history has been influenced by, among other

things, the rise of social 'history from below' (p.38) and the increased possibilities/technologies for the proliferation of imagery of the past and old photographs (p.337). The effect of taking elements of dress, music and leisure from other eras can appear as a kind of conservative revisiting of nostalgic images and myths, and a yearning to immerse oneself in the settings and scenarios of the past, as in a fantasy period drama. In 1981, the *Mirror* interviewed the band The Stray Cats as part of a feature piece on the Rockabilly revival. 'I learned all about rock 'n' roll from my parents. They were a genuine Fifties Happy Days kind of couple' said a young Brian Setzer, while the article declared the band 'one of the hottest properties on the music scene.' (Johnson and Taylor, 1981, p.17). On the dance floor at a Stray Cats gig, youngsters were interviewed about their interest, one jiver stating 'I learnt from me mum and dad. I'd only headbanged to heavy metal before.' A girl named Sandra was eager to comment, 'My mum started me off [...] Now I get all dressed up and it's proper dancin' innit' while her friend Tracy added, 'I used to be a punk and then I tried electronic, but I got bored. Now I'm a rockabilly rebel.' (ibid.).

This discussion illustrates perceptions and myths of the 1950s and what people use those images for; it illustrates the perceived value of 'proper dancing' in the aftermath of disco and 'doing your own thing'; myths of 'happy days' and how this translates into Setzer bawling out a song about 'Ma babay wears fishnet stockings' (Johnson and Taylor, 1981, p.17). It could be taken as an illustration of the way that young people 'try on' and play with identities rather than becoming 'card-carrying members of spectacular subcultures' (Clarke, 1990, p.83). Fundamentally, it illustrates how personal and popular memory of the past can come together to influence the lifestyle choices of a new

generation. Particularly because this is performed in everyday life through dress, collecting and leisure practices, this can appear to be a kind of re-enactment relating to a retreat from the present, signifying a lack of imagination and anti-progress. As Simon Reynolds laments with music: 'Instead of being the threshold to the future, the first ten years of the twenty-first century turned out to be the 'Re' Decade.' (2011, pxi).

In this section I will continue to explore how lived and embodied Fifties re-enactments operate along a dynamic of appearing on the surface to be about the past but actually reveal the processes and relationship between the past and the present. I will focus on aspects of participating in leisure activities which are related to or perceived to be part of the 1950s in terms of themed weekenders, dancing and music. Like the British seaside resort, the holiday camp itself carries a nostalgic resonance, such as the one depicted humourously in the 1980s comedy series *Hi-Di-Hi* (1980 – 1988), representing 'the seaside holiday camps of the immediate post-war years, which already seemed part of a distant past' (Walton, 2000, p.11). The specific historical popularity of the holiday camp is being tapped into in the hosting of Fifties weekender events at camps such as Rockabilly Rave at Pontins in Camber Sands, Sussex. In more dedicated scenes[14] of Fifties revival culture, dress, collecting and other lifestyle practices – music, dancing (typically jive), Fifties weekenders such as Rockabilly Rave – go hand in hand. This is frequently conceived as a re-enactment of past social behaviour and practices, as in the

[14] I use the term *scene* as it is frequently used by fans of rockabilly and the 1950s themselves as a way of discussing group identifications and practices. As Will Straw has observed, the notion of a scene allows for more flexibility of identifications and engagement than the term community, signifying 'a cultural space in which a range of musical practices coexist, interacting with each other within a variety of processes of differentiation, and according to widely varying trajectories of change and cross-fertilization.' (1991, p.373)

*Guardian*'s photo feature on the Hemsby Rock 'n' Roll Weekender which was titled 'rock 'n' roll enthusiasts relive the 50s' ('Rock 'n' roll enthusiasts…', 2011). Now a major event, the first Hemsby weekender was held in 1988, again reflecting the intensification of the 1950s revival through the 1980s, while the Rockabilly Rave was not established until 1996. Using the same photo collection as the *Guardian*, the *Daily Mail* opened its feature on the 2011 Hemsby weekender by stating: 'For those who inadvertently stumbled across a traditional holiday camp in Norfolk, they may well have wondered whether they had gone back in time.' ('Ready, teddy, go!', 2011). By seemingly immersing themselves in past – environments such as weekenders where everyone dresses up, drives old cars, dances to old music – the Fifties scene can be perceived as a kind of nostalgic time travel. The reporter comments, 'You wouldn't see this lot at Glastonbury' (ibid.) and there is the sense of 1950s style as complete break and rejection of popular culture of present.

However, the article unwittingly illustrates a number of contradictions; the girls 'who could have stepped straight from the set of a film' looked more reminiscent of the late 2000s soul singer Amy Winehouse with a blonde-streaked quiff, bright knotted headscarves and fake-fur jackets (ibid.). Cherry Rae who 'fans the flames of fifties fashion' wore a vampish leopard-print top, jet black arched eyebrows and full sleeve of intricate tattoos (ibid.). While tattoos have been identified as popular on the rockabilly revival going into the 1980s, they may not so simply be attributed to 'fifties fashion' as tattoos were somewhat taboo in Western culture of the 1950s, with associations of (male) sailors and the circus side show, tattoo parlours were restricted and sometimes

banned in 1950s America (Clerk, 2008, p.11). Carol Clerk[15] has traced the revival of 'traditional tattoo images' which appeal due to nostalgia and 'that quaint quality' (tattooist Lyle Tuttle qtd. in Clerk, 2008, p.248). Furthermore, Don Ed Hardy (who has capitalised on the growing tattoo trend most recently with his own brand of vintage tattoo design merchandise) suggests the origins of retro tattoos with US and UK rockabillies began in Japan:

> I began going back to Japan regularly throughout the 80s and early 90s […]. In Tokyo these Rockabillies and their friends began getting more and more tattoos. […] that sort of preceded this whole wave of interest in the retro look in the West and I think by the late 80s there was enough consciousness of it and enough of a resurrection of interest in general in the 40s and 50s by young hipsters that the retro look really became a trend, and through the Rockabilly bands like the Stray Cats that Bob Roberts had tattooed in New York in the early 80s.
> (Hardy, 2000, p.202)

Tattoos are associated more with *rockabilly* style rather than specific period styles of the 1950s, but frequently these are conflated. The illusion of the past is even more intense when people combine dressing up with the collective practice of apparently enacting leisure pastimes of the past such as attending dedicated festivals on holiday camps where they immerse themselves in the music and dancing of the past. Still, as I have illustrated briefly in this introduction, I assert that rather than wholesale time travel, what instead becomes apparent in these cultural practices is a process of interaction and tension between past and present.

*Rockabilly weekenders and retro holidays*

Though Fifties weekenders such as Hemsby can potentially be seen as re-enacting the past, unpicking the lived practices, activities and interactions of such events illustrate that this is a site where both past and present are played

[15] For more on the history of women and tattoos, see Margot Miflin's *Bodies of Subversion* (1997) which explores the story of women and tattooing through a progressive feminist history.

out. Actually doing social and cultural activities related to the 1950s are part of the building/consumption of a Fifties lifestyle and are tied up with conspicuous consumption and performance. It is useful here to note Rob Shields' observation that 'consumption sites are characterized by a new spatial form which is a synthesis of leisure and consumption activities' (Shields, ed., 1992, p.6). The activity of shopping and searching for items features as part of actual leisure time in the Fifties revival such as for Verity who spends 'my weekends at vintage fairs and boot sales picking up 'fifties bits' (Verity q/r) or Dave F and his wife who sometimes travel down to Brighton for the day to look around all the retro/vintage shops (i/v Dave F). Leisure activities such as residential weekenders involve combined activities of shopping, dancing and socialising which also offer opportunities for participating in the 'spectacle', 'the exchange of looks and gazes, [which] complements the theatrical display of goods and commodities' (Shields, ed., 1992, p.7). For example, the Hemsby Rock 'n' Roll weekender not only features live bands, DJs and dancing but during the day hosts many trade stalls selling vintage clothes and accessories, as well as a hairdresser offering 1950s styles for men and women and a tattoo parlour.

For most of my interviewees, an interest in rock 'n' roll or rockabilly music usually came first, followed by clothing style and other practices of consumption, collecting and leisure. The weekender represents the bringing together of all these elements and how it can create a fully immersive experience. For example, in Emma's case:

> I think for me the music is really important and for a lot of my friends it's kind of led by the music, it's led by where we go clubbing and also I suppose the other thing that brought me back into it was a few years ago learning to jive and then going to places to want to be able to jive. […] So I think a lot of the people that I know are kind of led by the music and the dancing and they want to go places where they can

> dance and they want to wear clothes and shoes that they can dance in and we go to weekenders and stuff where you go and see the bands and you go and listen to lots of music and always there is loads and loads of stalls that sell all the clothes and accessories and records and stuff like that. But nowadays it seems that there's lots of vintage stuff I suppose, all over. The Cath Kidston stuff, lots of design is very 50s-influenced. So lots of people are picking up little bits of it like a flower in their hair or just one or two dresses and who might not necessarily be that into the music. And in fact some of the people who go on the weekenders aren't really that into the music they just like all the dressing up and looking nice and stuff. (i/v Emma).

As Emma expresses, these styles have also had their own trajectory in broader consumer culture, usually through objects and clothes more than lived practices/cultures.

Donna also got into the Fifties scene through 'learning how to jive dance and lindy hop, which is quite big in Brighton'[16] and also noted people who went to classes and 'they start getting a fringe cut and then they want to wear a '50s dress or you know, high-waisted jeans and then they want to buy the saddle shoes and before they know it they've turned into, like, rockabilly or something!' (i/v Donna). Although glamour and dancing appealed to Verity first, the music followed shortly behind after a trip to the Rockabilly Rave weekender where 'The music was completely hitting my heart and I literally just couldn't keep still.' (i/v Verity). As these examples illustrate, the popularity of 1950s styles have often led to an influx of others coming 'into' the weekender and music scene the other way round – the clothes may come first, leading to an interest in the music and culture. The Vintage At Goodwood Festival was an example of this popularity writ large and encompassed the enmeshed nature of self-expression, pleasure and consumption in lifestyle cultures. The festival offered a mixed

[16] Indeed there are past-present tensions of race here which I will explore in more detail later: the retro revival of dance and style in the form of lindy hop, jive and rockabilly music appears very 'white' in contrast to the cultural forms it celebrates which are frequently of black origin such as jazz, rhythm and blues, as well as partner dances such as lindy hop and jive.

programme that combined opportunities for listening to the music, learning the dances, dressing up and purchasing Fifties lifestyles. And it also offered opportunities for 'display', as Donna states who 'Got on the front of the *Guardian*, […] it was really fun! […] It was a bit like being a bit famous, a lot of 'papping' going on at the festival which I think made everyone feel quite special.' (i/v Donna).

The festival/weekender scene reveals some distinctions between Fifties revivalists who have been interested in the scene for a long time and those of more 'casual' interest or not so dedicated to the music (such as the perception of the 'dancers' referred to by Dave P). Donna commented, 'it probably looks quite cliquey from the outside' (i/v Donna). However, for those involved, such as Dave F, the community within the rock n' roll/rockabilly scene is so important that his response to a question about what epitomised the 1950s for him was 'Clothing style and friendship more than anything. […] We've got friends that have been on the 50s scene since the 50s. […] So the people on the scene, there's a bond between them, and it's not just the music or the style, it seems like the friendships that are built do last the test of time.' (i/v Dave F). Here the combined construction of a cohesive group around taste and style offers friendship and a community. The immersive environments of the jive event or weekender can help provide a network of friendship in the present. While perceptions of the actual 1950s as more 'community spirited' is frequently referred to (and this will be explored further in Chapter 2), in practice it is the physical community of *now* that is the focus. Furthermore, weekenders are re-enactments of Fifties lifestyles only in so much as visual hints – instead of being 'accurate' period reconstructions they evoke contrasting myths of the past in the

service of present consumption and pleasure. Rather than hiding its constructed nature, the 'nuts and bolts' of potentially becoming part of 'the gang' are visible for all to see at weekenders, in the form of stalls where individuals can purchase the requisite styles. In addition, the types of behaviour and enjoyment at weekenders make visible the contradictions between ideas about the 1950s. Verity illustrates this as she talks about how people in the 1950s might have dressed for events:

> Everyone there, especially in the evenings, everyone looks like movie stars you know, like real Hollywood movie stars which is quite a funny thing 'cause English people that are on the rockin' scene really make the effort. […] You know if they [people in the 1950s] went to a weekender then, then yeah they wouldn't have dressed up as much as we do now. But when they went to bigger, more glamorous clubs they would, whereas […] in the UK we don't have a huge glamorous ballroom that people are going to go to. So yeah that probably is quite a difference from then to now but I think that's just our sort of, it's not a version of it, I don't think we really change anything, that's just the big event for us. Whereas going to this beautiful ballroom was the event for them, now, you know, you wear your best frock to the best event. (i/v Verity)

Verity illustrates the *interaction* between past and present in her comparison between the 'rockin' scene' re-enactment of 1950s leisure and what people might have done 'then'. Whether or not rock 'n' roll weekenders actually existed in the 1950s, she illustrates an understanding that leisure practices *have* changed and that they are not imitating exactly what people must have done in their leisure time. She acknowledges that Fifties revival culture is more about adapting past leisure activities for today's context – lacking the imagined ballrooms of old we explore other leisure options for the present through creating weekenders. She goes on,

> Friends of ours have been to one of the 'dance' weekenders […] and it was quite... tame. So everyone went out and danced and had a few drinks and then go home to their chalets at sort of 12 o'clock. Whereas on the rockin' scene it's on 'til '6 o'clock, everyone's pissed as farts when

> they come out, you know, singing and sometimes there's chalet parties all night long and you know, everyone brings an instrument, amps and, come and, the party just never stops at our sort of weekenders. It's a lot more freewheeling I suppose. (i/v Verity)

Indeed, the culture of weekenders is frequently heavily focused on pleasure, dance, and alcohol consumption which has more in common with the late-20th century 'me generation' mentioned by Samuel than with the loitering frothy coffee consuming jukebox crowd of the milk bars of the late 1950s. While the jukebox bars were perhaps a kind of cultural resistance (Horn, 2009), the beer drinking and carousing at weekenders is arguably more about ideas of leisure and rebellion that have developed *since* the 1950s. These contradictions and cultural fissures between the actual 1950s and Fifties revival culture can open up a conversation about the 1950s in relation to the present, rather than just a static assumption of what the past was like. Fifties weekenders are not educational re-enactment society-style events; they are sites of leisure and play for the present, in which the 1950s becomes an immersive theatrical spectacle of exaggerated glamour, fantasy and performance.

In addition, it is worth noting that weekenders are often set within a suitably 'period' setting of mid-century holiday camps, such as the Hemsby Rock 'n' Roll Weekender at the Seacroft holiday camp in Norfolk, or the Rockabilly Rave at Pontins in Camber Sands, East Sussex which boasts: 'Great clothes, cars, music and laughter…no wonder people don't want to leave to return to the boring modern world.' (Pontins website). Again reflecting the symbiotic relationship between so-called subcultural 'niche' interests and the mainstream, retro holidays are not a trend isolated to committed Fifties enthusiasts. There is now a market in Britain for experiencing a version of the holidays of yesteryear. 'Vintage Vacations' on the Isle of Wight offers classic

British caravans, though these have 'slightly less on board facilities' than their showy American neighbours, while their website also boasts authenticity: 'They are all properly vintage – nothing 'retro' here!' (Vintage Vacations website). Reflecting the taste for retro Americana, there are a number of sites in the UK now offering stays in American vintage trailers, such as 'Happy Days RV' in Dorset. Utilising the name of the well-known nostalgic 1970s sitcom, Happy Days RV boasts itself as 'the ultimate in kitsch camping', authentically preserving the past but furnished for the needs of the present: their caravans 'have been sympathetically updated to make them cosy and welcoming but also keeping as much of their original features as possible.' (Happy Days RV website). This illustrates that while the styles of the past are utilised as pleasurable and quaint, this apparently immersive experience only goes as far as aesthetics, they are largely adapted for present day expectations of tourist comfort.

*The partner dance revival: old steps, new meanings*

Another apparently historical relic from the past being revived from the 1950s is partner dancing and there has been a proliferation in the UK of jive dance classes and retro club nights.[17] A more formalised way of learning partner dances has been perhaps helped in part by the recent popularity of BBC One's *Strictly Come Dancing*, but for teds jiving and bopping has been a feature of their leisure time since the 1950s, and by ted and rockabilly revivalists during the 1970s and 1980s. This section will analyse how in some ways it appears to feed nostalgia for a 'simpler' time and for the imagined heteronormative and gender boundaries of yesteryear. Furthermore, while

[17] For example, Brighton Jive http://www.brighton-jive.co.uk/; London Swing Dance Society http://www.swingdanceuk.com/; Gloster Jive and Swing http://www.jiveandswing.co.uk.

frequently being obsessed with 'historical provenance' the jive and swing dance revival appears in some ways largely white and middle-class, distorting the roots of the dances in black American culture.

Most of my interviewees engage in some kind of dancing related to the 1950s, whether learning to jive via a class or informally on the club scene. Still, they also sometimes distinguish themselves from what they see as being 'trendy' or popular in broader culture. Dave P related a friend's comments at Rockabilly Rave, when he encountered some people who were there to dance:

> I think [...] Strictly Come Dancing which has made a lot of people go into ballrooms to dance classes, to learn to dance ballroom jive. And those of us who sort of grew up in the 70s on the 50s scene, we danced to emulate the music that we saw in films like *Rock Around the Clock*. So it's a completely different type of dancing. It's not regimented at all. So you'd get people who are obviously not into the music as far as dressing the same as us or even the music was concerned but that they were just listening for how many beats per second was going on so as they could do their little dance... And looking at them one of [my friend's] comments was 'You could put ABBA on and, as long as it had the required beats and that they could do their little jive to it they'd be happy!' (i/v Dave P)

Dave P relates how he and his friends watched American films from the 1950s to learn the American style of jive, 'working it out' and trying to emulate their moves. There is a suggestion that this method is perhaps more legitimate because it has been gleaned organically from original 1950s cultural artefacts. Similarly Tom, one of my older respondents who actually lived through the 1950s, differentiates himself from the more mainstream methods of 'learning' to dance:

> I just do it myself really. Just got with the beat or get with the rhythm and just started doing it myself really. Nobody taught me, I just started doing it really. [...] You don't need to go to the classes, you can just do it yourself, just get the rhythm. (i/v Tom)

Indeed, the historical provenance of jive dancing and its association with a bygone age has let to it being used as a crowd-pleasing addition at 1950s

‘history days’, representing a re-enactment of 1950s life and culture as with the Brighton Museum programme entry quoted earlier in this chapter inviting visitors to ‘learn to jive’. Dancing can conjure up ideas about old social mores and customs, as Verity comments, ‘I absolutely love going out dancing. Just everything you know, the fact that a guy would come up and ask a girl to dance which just doesn't happen anymore.’ (i/v Verity). Here again is a sense of a return to ‘lost’ traditions of the past that relates to the culture of tea and cake, craft and good manners alluded to above which particularly relates to gender, themes I will explore further in Chapter 2.

I discuss jive and lindy hop dancing together because even though they are historically different dances, they are linked as broadly ‘swing’ dances utilising a reworking of past dance styles related to black music and culture emerging from the American jazz age. Indeed, the resurgence of swing dancing can be seen as revealing disconnects between the past and present, rather than a return to tradition both in terms of what it suggests about gender as well as the apparent co-opting of black culture. Donna illustrated a moment when experience and popular memory collide when she noted, ‘I just presumed my Nan would know how to jive and she doesn't. And you watch these films and you presume all the teenagers were doing that.’ (i/v Donna). Indeed, as I noted with Dave F’s experience above, the revival of jive not only came from the original teds who perhaps did jive in the late-1950s but also from the study of Hollywood films about American teenagers. There are also clearly new meanings being ascribed to partner dancing which utilises and resurrects dances from the past but evolves them and makes them relevant to the present.

Dance classes have also become a specialised pastime or hobby and

performance, particularly for young people, rather than a complete 'return' to some idea of social norms of yesteryear. Modern appropriations of jive also encourage an exploration of history and the unpicking of the traditions and politics of partner dancing. From evidence based on my own participation in swing and jive communities in Brighton, even though it is still accepted form that men usually 'lead' and women usually 'follow' it is common in swing and jive for women in particular to learn the lead roles and dance with one another. Often the teacher will joke about the notion of the woman as 'follower' and the male as 'lead' as a kind of performance and more as part of the coordination of the dance than a yearning to 'go back' to any kind of particular tradition. Furthermore, dance website the Jive Hive has a section on 'dance etiquette' that is fit for 21st century democratic and politically correct sensibilities. For example, the site states that 'It's believed that traditionally the man is expected to ask the women to dance. This is merely derived from observation rather than by knowing the rules on the subject' and it frequently refers throughout to *both* genders potentially being the initiator of a dance: 'Generally if you did the asking (male or female) you should escort you[r] partner off the floor.' (Jive Hive website).

Samantha Carroll has also complicated the relationship between the past and present in her analysis of the revival of lindy hop. Referring to it through Henry Jenkins' (1992) term of 'textual poaching' relating to appropriation by fan cultures, Carroll describes the popularity of the modern lindy hop and other swing dance scenes since the 1980s. She illustrates the 'selective' quality of revival culture in her analysis of contemporary swing dancing; on the one hand keeping the organic authenticity of lindy hop is essential, on the other the dance

is potentially stripped of its original historical context of black dance. Indeed, a thoroughly modern technology has enabled accelerated consumption of vintage and retro style: the internet. Carroll traces the roots of lindy hop to what she refers to as 'African-American vernacular dance' (2008, p.183), that is, dance as an everyday social and public practice rather than formalised in theatres or dance classes (ibid.). The meaning of the dance certainly does change when taken out of context – what was a form of African-American subversion has become a pastime for white middle class youth (p.190). According to Carroll, while these dances are adopted with some reference to history, they are frequently learned mostly through contemporary forms of learning dance and sharing steps through YouTube and other digital forms.

While it can be argued that the use of partner dancing in some ways neutralises the complexity of its history (such as those issues of race), it also illustrates some reflexivity on that history as part of its culture such as utilising the internet for old video clips of dancers. For example, many a lindy-hopper would have come across the famous dance scene from *Hellzapoppin* (1941) which shows a demonstration of supreme acrobatic lindy hop skills from a cast of black dancers; this iconic clip was embedded in a 2010 advertisement for 'A Midsummer Night's Swing' at London's Stoke Newington Town Hall (Barbican website) and features prominently on other lindy hop sites such as lindyhopmoves.com and savoystyle.com. Furthermore, while the revival of partner dancing somewhat tries to revisit the imagined social mores of the past, it is resolutely adapted for the present context and takes pleasure in that perceived contrast. In its adaptation for the present it both discusses and unsettles perceived 'tradition' such as the automatic male lead in dance. I will

discuss further issues of race in the Fifties revival below but I argue that the revival of partner dances trades on an interaction between past and present. Nostalgia and fascination with the social practices of the past provides something new and different to participate in for the present; it also frequently comes with a fascination and excavation of the history and provenance of dances and steps.

*Music and the Fifties*

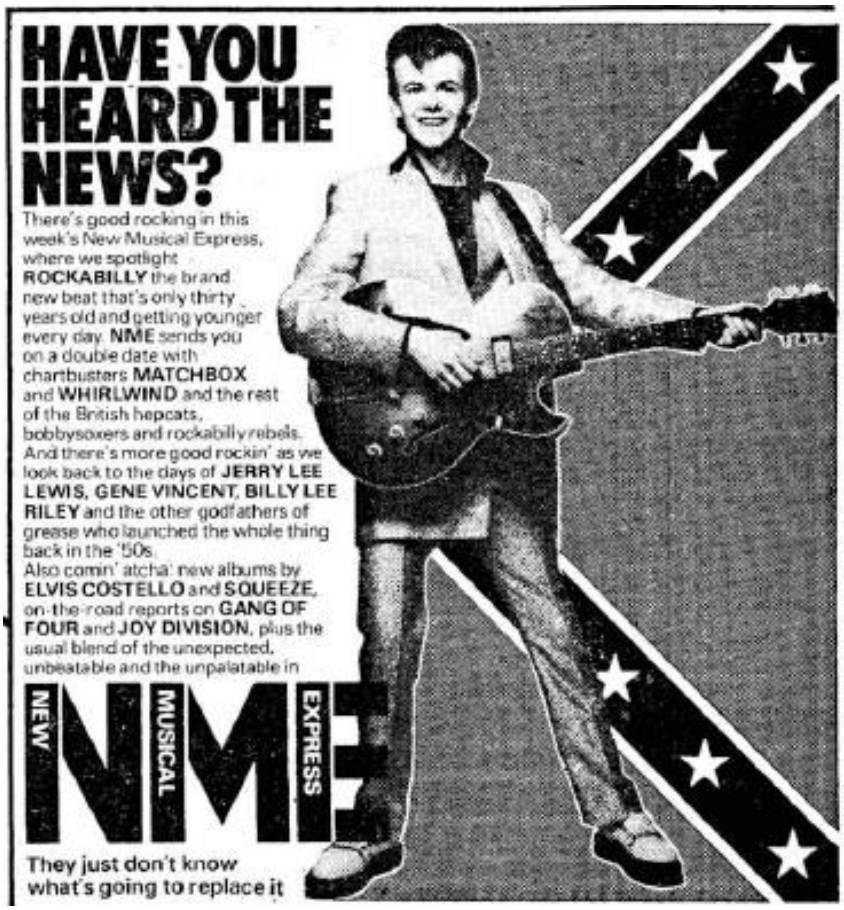


Image 6: From *Daily Mirror*, 14 February 1980, p.9.

'There's good rocking in this week's New Musical Express, where we spotlight ROCKABILLY the brand new beat that's only thirty years old and getting younger every day.' states the above advert for the next issue of *NME* in February 1980. This intriguing paradox refers to the fact that rockabilly music

was becoming a musical trend for a new generation and indeed, there are resonances between past and present in the taste for 1950s music and the continual excavation of enthusiasts of the back catalogue of rock 'n' roll. It is clear that listening to 1950s music is a central pastime of most of my interviewees and there is the reoccurring dialogue around authenticity as with style and collecting practices. Simon Reynolds' account of 'retromania' comments that the revival of 1950s music illustrates some kind of lack of innovation. Citing Shakin' Stevens[18] in the musicals *Elvis!* and *Grease* and the band Showaddywaddy as examples of the 'mainstream', he states, 'What's puzzling in hindsight is how all these hipper-than-though rockabillies differentiated in their own heads what they were doing from the mainstream fifties revival that ran all through this period' (2011, p.306).

However, this may be less 'puzzling' or at least might be illuminated by actually speaking to individuals who are interested in this music. Frequently in fact, individuals do recognise the interaction between the so-called 'mainstream fifties revival' and their activities, even though at first they may seem disparaging. My interviews have involved dialogues about the distinctions between various 1950s-influenced genres and styles. These conversations revolve around authenticity and again, like clothing style, a preference for music that has the provenance or weight of history behind it. In the 1970s, McLaren and Westwood harnessed the particular heritage of rock 'n' roll as a response to the music and style of the 1960s which had taken 'rock' in a different direction. In a similar way, my interviewees often expressed strong views on the direction

[18] Despite his later 'mainstream' pop fame, Shakin' Stevens was in fact one of the earliest UK rock 'n' roll revivalists according to Craig Morrison: 'Since the 1960s Shakin' Stevens and his band the Sunsets defiantly carried the torch for rock 'n' roll, especially rockabilly, through the United Kingdom and the Continent.' (1998, p.230)

of music after 1963. For example, Dave P states that 'to this day I feel that the Beatles are one of the most overrated bands ever! And of course all the people I used to go to school with they were all into that music and later on in secondary school it was glam rock and disco and I never really got into it, I never really understood' (i/v Dave P). Allen also differentiates between rock 'n' roll and the 'rock' music that preceded it: 'it wasn't until about 1962-63 that rock 'n' roll died a death and then along came the Beatles, in Britain and America. So about 1963 rock 'n' roll died, basically. Proper rock 'n' roll died. I mean people call rock 'n' roll things like INXS, you know, it ain't rock 'n' roll, I'm sorry, it's a bunch of hairy geezers screaming, it's not rock 'n' roll.' (i/v Allen).

Furthermore, Allen got into British Rock 'n' Roll, the music of the ted revival in the 1960s/70s, then began to dig deeper and go further back to the origins of Rock n' Roll in rockabilly, black rhythm and blues and 'rarer' records:

> about 1977-ish, a friend of mine used to go to a club, the T U L club in Leicester which was a working men's club, they used to have rock n roll on a Sunday afternoon and all the kids used to kind of get into it and wear drapes, it was all very sad, they were teddy boys! […] And then I kind of got out of that within about 3 months and found real rock 'n' roll, the music was the main thing. Started off with things like LaVern Baker, *Batman to the Rescue*, all that kind of thing, really liked the beat of that music. The old blues, the rhythm and blues. (i/v Allen)

Many of my older interviewees witnessed the growth of popularity of acts like Shakin' Stevens, Matchbox and The Stray Cats during the late 1970s and 1980s. Old rhythm and blues was sometimes used as a way to distance themselves from the popularisation of the rockabilly genre, once it began seeping into the mainstream charts:

> Matchbox, they were an absolutely brilliant band on the pub circuit and the club circuit. And then you had the likes of them and Shakin' Stevens and people like that coming up on Top Of The Pops and hitting the charts. And it just ruined completely what they were originally. [...] And

> the music industry tends to put what they think the public wants, there is a market for the 50s music but they think 'right, we want the 50s music, it's something that's catching on, but we want it to be sellable.
> (i/v Dave F)

Indeed, even in the mainstream 'market' for 1950s influenced sounds this association with excavating the past for something 'original' is a central part of its appeal. Richard Hawley, with his dark-edged nostalgic ballads and rockabilly guitar solos played with bands in the 1990s such as the Longpigs and Pulp before finding a solo career with a rockabilly-tinged sound. He's been referred to as 'the Elvis of the North' (Sheffield, 2009) and his album *Coles Corner* was nominated in 2006 for the Mercury Music Prize. His collaboration with seventies crooner Tony Christie on the album *Made In Sheffield* seemed to cement his link with the North and its musical past, while his first band 'was focused on traditional song writing values and ignored the current fads; electronic, goth and house' (Richard Hawley website). Hawley's solo material is described as 'Harking back to what seemed to be another time, it never became pastiche, simply timeless music' (ibid.). Hawley's Fifties-ness carries with it the distinction of being part of an authentic, historical and 'timeless' musical canon rather than 'fads'.

It is true that many interviewees such as Allen, Dave F and Dave P have dug further into the archives of American rockabilly, as a reaction to their present context of what they see as a commercialisation and watering down of original music during the 1980s. However, despite a distaste for some artists such as Shakin' Stevens and Matchbox who had been seen as 'selling out' there was also an acquiescence towards a new generation of rockabilly/rock n' roll fans and artists because 'it helps keep music alive' (i/v Dave F) and gives 'a new lease of life within the rock 'n' roll/rockabilly scene' (i/v Allen). Simon

Reynolds notes the influence of rock 'n' roll on sounds of the 1970s onwards and their use of various contrasting perceptions of the 1950s. While first referencing the influence of 'wholesome' American TV/film remakes of the 1950s during the 1970s such as *Happy Days* and *Grease*, Reynolds notes:

> 'Innocence' is not the only thing that seventies musicians sought and found in the fifties. As fifties revivalism continued and diversified in the second half of the seventies, two other 'essences' of rock 'n' roll came to the fore. Some bands, like The Cramps, focused on rockabilly's febrile sexuality and 'real gone' frenzy. [...] Others homed in on the histrionic excess of rock 'n' roll's more poptastic and produced side, figures like Phil Spector, Roy Orbison and Del Shannon. (2011, p.294)

Indeed, there are new artists on the rock n' roll/rockabilly scene who could be seen to imitate and 'bring back' the 1950s but appropriates those styles in a way that seems barely recognisable. For example, Imelda May was mentioned approvingly as a new rockabilly artist by Tom and Dave P. May's styling is a 'hard' look that almost references punk with her penchant for animal print, bold stripes and day-glo colours, the blonde streak in her trademark jet black curled up fringe, leather, figure-hugging outfits and sultry red lips suggesting a fantasy poster girl from an 1950s American B-movie.

Image 7: Imelda May Tribal album cover, 2014.
(image from Amazon website)

But then punk and other harder music styles are often never far away from the Fifties revival, as noted above in its British origins with McLaren and Westwood and the 'lunatic fringe' of the rockabilly revival referred to by Craig Morrison as 'trashabilly, thrashabilly, punkabilly, and most durably, psychobilly.' (1998, p.249). May's 2010 single *Mayhem* has smooth production values and a

flawless vocal that would not sound out of place up against the likes of other contemporary chart divas such as Beyoncé. Another female singer, the late Amy Winehouse is often referred to as representing a 1950s and 1960s sound and style, as female fashion magazine *Grazia* asserted in a tribute issue, 'Amy's look was [...] Audrey Hepburn, by way of a waitress in a down-at-heel US diner. [...] Amy also inspired the girl on the street to go rockabilly.' (Vernon, 2011, 19). Winehouse also had the requisite 'old-school style' tattoos featured in Carol Clerk's exploration of the popularity of vintage tattoos (2008, p.240). It can be seen that in music, as in dress, Fifties sounds are *selected* in such a way that it creates a diverse and conflicting range of moods and tones which are not necessarily at all related to the historical 1950s. While the dynamics of distinction and authenticity play out through the interest in 1950s music and particular genres, they are answering a need in the present and not necessarily at all related to the historical 1950s.

*Re-creating Fifties space: home and collecting*

As I have explored above, re-enacting the 1950s operates through a process of leisure practices in music, dancing and clothing which come together on the public sphere in the form of weekenders. Another way in which the Fifties revival is expressed is through the private sphere of the home. Like Fifties weekenders, the home is a space of convergence where cultural, taste and leisure choices come together. The domestic interior in a space which reflects both taste and identity[19] and consumption as leisure activity is displayed through retro interiors. The home can be populated by objects which reflect an affinity with the actual 1950s, purchased through the activities of shopping at

[19] For more on the meanings of home and home as a representational practice see, for example, Jackson and Moores eds., 1995, and Downey, 2013.

car boot sales and vintage fairs.

In a popular documentary series on Channel 4 in 2012, the artist Grayson Perry explored the politics of taste in Britain today with a particular emphasis on the construction of identity through interiors. It was telling that the trend for 'retro vintage' interiors was attributed to aspects of the middle-class. Perry referred to the 'cultural capital' on display which reflected aspiration, confidence, knowledge, along with a (calculated) sense of humour and irony: 'the need to show you can play around with the rules' while staying on the right side of kitsch (*All In The Best Possible Taste*, Channel 4, 2012). Perhaps because of the ironic connotations, Fifties interiors are frequently represented as both a return to an imagined domesticity as well as a sense of fun, quirkiness and colour. Perry's documentary suggested that vintage interiors were very much situated in terms of the anxieties of defining a class position in the here and now, despite the apparent carefree appearance, there were distinct rules around what 'works' and what is a bit 'too kitsch'. In a related way, this final section analyses the creation of Fifties space in the home through a collection of objects. I suggest that if one takes this domestic revival beyond face value, the apparent re-enactment of 1950s interiors and the collecting of ephemera are more about present day needs and identities than the past.

The documentary *Time Warp Wives* featured as their '1950s' representative Joanne Massey, who performs as 1940s and 1950s singer under the name Lola Lamour. In the late 2000s, she received a flurry of publicity in local and national press fascinated with the idea of a woman living in a 1950s 'time warp' (For example 'Old fashioned couple in a 50s time warp', 2008 and 'Why 1950s-loving Joanne is happily stuck in the past', 2009). She also

appeared in a photo feature for over-50s women's magazine *Yours* introduced as 'Joanne Massey, a woman who adores the Fifties so much she has modelled her whole life on that era.' (Williams, 2008, p.22). Various photos show 35-year-old Massey in her home decorated in mostly primary and pastel colours, and surrounded by period household detail, as the article describes her and her husband's lifestyle:

> Joanne does admit that she has a couple of modern gadgets, including a microwave and computer that she couldn't live without, but the rest of her home contains appliances like her authentic New World cooker, Prestcold fridge and Kenwood food mixer. Joanne loves driving her Ford Anglia car and the couple enjoy holidays in their own 1960 Cheltenham caravan. (ibid.).

Not old enough to have lived through the 1950s, the article describes how 'her keen interest in the Fifties has taken over virtually every aspect of her life. From her elegant clothes to her immaculate make-up and hair, she's the image of a gorgeous Fifties starlet.' (p.22). By transforming her home effectively into a museum piece, the article states, 'you could be forgiven for thinking you'd stepped back in time 50 years' (p.22).

Image 8: Joanne Massey at home in her kitchen. (image from Appleyard, 2008)

One of my respondents, Verity, had seen Massey out on the 1950s scene saying, ‘she is actually just like that, she literally just wants to live in the 50s, like everything being immaculate.’ (i/v Verity). Massey is therefore depicted as advocating a wholesale transformation and time travel to the past.

Collecting and populating our lives with material objects, particularly in relation to furnishing the home, is an important part of ones’ identity. As Tim Dant writes, ‘a house is a locus for material culture, a meeting point for people and things, in which social relationships and material relationships are almost indistinguishable because both are bound together in the routine practices of everyday life.’ (1999, p.60). In the article in *Yours*, the main photo of Massey has her immaculately coiffured with a yellow dress and bright printed pinny, recipe book in hand and a wooden spoon in the other. Her attention to detail is framed as a testament to her passion for the 1950s and presumably part of the source of fascination for readers who, judging by the demographic of *Yours*, may have actually lived through the 1950s. They are addressed directly by a caption to the photograph, ‘How many of the items in Joanne’s kitchen bring back memories for you?’ (Williams, 2008, p.23). Massey’s kitchen is set up almost as a museum piece; not of high art or rare artefacts, but the assembly of everyday domestic objects of the past as a repository of collective memory.

While Massey may seem like a more extreme example, a large part of the Fifties revival is not just clothing but also lifestyle products and home wares. Items once considered everyday utility are now considered desirable design such as Formica tables, cocktail bars and Woolworth’s ‘Homemaker’ design crockery. Fifties styles also have a more general mainstream appeal in 21st century Britain. The objects resurrected are frequently domestic everyday cast-

offs or ‘the flotsam and jetsam of everyday life’ (Samuel, 1994, p.85). The *Guardian* magazine’s ‘Retro’ issue from 2007 illustrated how vintage objects have become desirable enough taste for a national broadsheet newspaper. It featured people who style their homes in the design and furniture of various eras – the 1950s featured Sarah-Jane Magee, whose particular version of Fifties taste was defined by her as ‘trailer trash, really. They call me the queen of tat.’ (Guardian Magazine, 2007, p.86). She is pictured in a white and pink floral dress with frilly lace petticoat, reclining with a cocktail in a pink polka-dot cup on a leopard-print deckchair in front of a shiny Airstream caravan; flowerpots, plastic pink lawn flamingos and a Bush radio compliment the scene. For Magee, ‘The thing about the 50s is it’s fun. Everything makes me smile – the design, the humour, the music, the clothes. My motto is Born Too Late (it’s a song by American 50s band the Poni-Tails).’ (ibid.). Around the image of Magee are pictures of suggested items for readers to purchase to ‘get the look’, a ‘Tiki hula-girl lamp’ for £75, a ‘Sunburst clock’ for £179.50 and a ‘Pineapple ice bucket’ for £40, all available at various online stores (ibid.). Apart from vintage originals in antique shops and online stores such as eBay, many high street stores are producing items influenced by 1950s design while manufacturers are resurrecting original designs for a brand new generation. This can be seen in 2014 at both ends of the consumer spectrum, from a cheap Fifties diner-esque ‘retro’ wall clock for £10 at supermarket Tesco or for the bigger spenders, a reissued Ercol studio couch for over £2500.


Image 9: Tesco retro wall clock (image from Tesco website)

Image 10: Ercol studio couch (image from Ercol website)

Apart from clothing, many of my interviewees were engaged in collecting lifestyle items from (or based upon) Fifties aesthetics to varying degrees. For example, I interviewed Verity in her home which had a large lounge room featuring a retro cocktail bar and original vintage sofas which she had 'found on a houseboat the other day, they need recovering but...I think I paid a hundred quid for them and they're worth loads!' (i/v Verity). Set against the world of mp.3 and digital media, Verity 'wanted a radiogram for years and then I found one for five pounds that worked, that has all its original instructions and paperwork with it.' (ibid.) Similarly, I interviewed Donna in her lounge which featured vintage items such as a bright orange tile-topped coffee table, Siamese cat ornaments 'probably 50s' and a circular teak and glass G-plan coffee table.

Those who do not choose to live among Fifties style objects are nonetheless involved in other collecting practices as a hobby or interest, and apparent authenticity to the past plays a large role. For example, Dave P explained, 'I don't go as far as to have my entire house furnished like it, for one thing my wife probably wouldn't accept it and […] Furniture is, apart from the

fact that it's really expensive, it's not particularly comfortable as far as today's expectations are concerned.' (i/v Dave P). On the other hand he is an avid record collector, occasionally writing sleeve notes for re-released rockabilly records. Ralph W is similar – the reflection of his interest in the Fifties in his home is limited to a cocktail bar and some framed pin-up or club night posters. These are more reflective icons of the Fifties rockabilly scene than any effort towards an authentic decoration of his home as a tribute to actual 1950s living. On the other hand, he is committed to searching out original vinyl 45s for his DJing, as well as taking care of his original 1951 Ford F1 pickup truck:

> I do DJing and I've got a lot of vintage 45s and do quite a lot of gigs myself as well. Bought myself a pickup truck a few years ago which I take to all the car shows and stuff which is good fun as well […] my records really range in price from, normally ten or twenty pound a 45, and then if there's something really special I will pay up to fifty pounds I guess! (i/v Ralph W)

I interviewed Allen in his London flat and he described his interest as 'everything that I literally do is all based around [the Fifties], apart from my work [on London Underground] obviously. Whenever I'm not in work I wear 50s clothes. my house as you can see it's all 50s [...].' (i/v Allen). Indeed, his lounge featured the requisite cocktail bar, old film posters and display cabinets filled with original 1940s/1950s Lucite[20] handbags displayed like museum pieces.

*Setting the 1950s scene: pastiche and the clash of past and present*

While outward appearances of collecting may seem like an effort to re-enact or recreate the habitats and lifestyles of the past, I argue that these engagements are more profitably viewed as being about present concerns and contexts. They often appear to be so detailed and 'perfect' that they border on

[20] Lucite handbags have their own cult following on the 1950s scene, particularly with those who love American style and rockabilly. Lucite is a type of hard plastic developed in the USA in the post-Second World War era, frequently in outlandish shapes with pearlescent finishes, grains of glitter embedded in the plastic, or in bright colours (see Berkson, 2009).

pastiche, drawing attention to their constructed nature. Furthermore, the building of 'lifestyle' can be seen as a personal expression of the present self through acts of consumption. As Rob Shields notes from de Certeau, consumption can be treated 'as an active, committed production of self and of society which, rather than assimilating individuals to styles, appropriates codes and fashions, which are made into one's own' (1992, p.2). I assert that in the conscious construction of an apparent 're-enactment' of 1950s lifestyles, there is a mixing of past and present which not only comes from the collective trends of popular culture such as films, but that these are adapted for the needs of the individual in the present in flexible ways.

Firstly, the apparent attention to detail in retro lifestyles can make the representation of the Fifties seem unnatural or 'hyper-real'. I use this term after Baudrillard (1983), to suggest that the media's fetishisation of 'period' detail as well as pointed references to its own popular cultural history draws attention to the 'unreality' of the depiction itself. This is a line of argument supported by Richard Dyer's discussions of pastiche (2009) and Pam Cook's analysis of film and nostalgia (2005). Indeed, thinking about the representation of Joanne Massey, there is an attention to detail leading to the presumption of some kind of time travel which is actually more reminiscent of a period drama. Raphael Samuel was critical of the 1987 film adaptation of *Little Dorrit* for, among other things, sanitising the darker elements and cleansing the setting of 'malodorous London' (1994, p.402) with museum-like 'period' detail:

> Film requires a different aesthetic from conservation, and *Little Dorrit* illustrates some of the difficulties of attempting to marry the two. The sets, so lovingly reconstructed, take on a life of their own. The period costume, with its high arm-holes, turn the actors and actresses into clothes-hangers. [...] The beautiful copperware makes even the Clennam kitchen cosy. (p.410)

Here Samuel seems to be finding the excessive attention to everyday details creates an unrealistic portrayal of what is meant to be everyday working Victorian people, homes and streets. It also seems to be of a level that distracts Samuel from an emotional engagement with the story because 'It seemed we had been witness to a spectacle rather than engaged by a drama.' (pp.414-5). Frequently, the obsessive collecting of items that look '1950s' fetishises detail and creates an over-exaggerated look that draws attention to the fact of it being a representation rather than an authentic past. Similarly, with reference to the 1950s, Pam Cook highlights these qualities in how the 1985 film *Dance With A Stranger* depicted the story of Ruth Ellis, the last woman to be hanged in Britain in 1955. According to Cook, the film luxuriated in period detail and references to Hollywood, presenting Miranda Richardson as a meticulously styled imitation of the peroxide blonde Ellis, surrounded by 'very 1950s' details and artefacts (2005, p.225). This over-saturation of details brings into focus the notion that this is a *present representation*, as in Cook's suggestion that the 'tendency of costume and period display to appear as masquerade, bring[s] it uncomfortably close to presenting history as fabrication' (p.68). Hence, these period re-enactments potentially open up a space for the exploration of the nature of historical construction in the present rather than just looking back on 'authentic' history itself.

Indeed, it would be interesting to know what the readers of *Yours* thought in relation to the appearance of Massey's kitchen sparking off their own memories of the 1950s. Massey's kitchen is pictured clutter and food free and pops with bright colours; her cocktail bar is filled with glass shelves of flawless coloured tumblers; her bedroom features framed Doris Day film posters and a

shiny gold bedspread. In contrast to this, memories of the 1950s are not of pastel colours, new appliances and space-age design, as described by this Mass Observation correspondent:

> The Festival of Britain didn't make much impact in the North West, apart from the spiky-legged furniture and the odd colour schemes that it featured. Utility furniture was what most of us had, if we were lucky. (R1760: female, aged 72)

Another responded, 'Clothes were frumpy, homes modest, even shabby especially in the early fifties, hangover from the War. Some of our own domestic colour schemes were abominable (we had tartan wallpaper on one wall in our living room, with patterned carpet! [...]' (N1952: female, aged 71). Therefore, one can view these apparent modern lifestyle re-enactments of turning ones home into a 1950s 'time-capsule' not as a wholesale journey back to the past, but as a kind of imaginative construction made possible in the present.

Contributing to the sense of hyperbole and impossibility in the Fifties homes of today is the influence of television and film images on peoples' collecting habits. As I mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, digital technologies have opened up opportunities for a visualisation of our past in the period since the Second World War with more and more ways to photograph, record and produce media, creating a huge visual archive of the past. These opportunities may account for the resurrection of Fifties styles being particularly accelerated through the 1970s and 1980s. For example, Massey was influenced in her Fifties fandom by growing up watching television reruns and old films, so that her style is perhaps more influenced by a fantasy of Hollywood than an authentic re-enactment of the 1950s:

> Even as a little girl, Joanne Massey was fascinated by glamorous

> Fifties stars like Doris Day and Rita Hayworth, and adored watching classic comedy shows like *Bewitched* and *I Love Lucy* on TV. (Williams, 2008, p.22)

It is intriguing that for all her reported dedication to the 1950s, Massey's current website for her role as a performer states 'I am well known for my many shows on the 1940's re-enactment scene' and she is pictured in many different 'retro' period styles. This illustrates the interchangeable nature of the use of past styles, despite certain individuals apparently identifying with specific eras. Verity also expresses how the inclination towards 1950s styles can be sparked from media representations:

> I remember being a really young child, probably maybe two, three, something like that and seeing old films on the TV and just not understanding why it wasn't like that now, like, why I didn't see people dressed like that now. As I got older watched more and more films. [...] I just got really into singing and dancing as every little girl does and just [...] wanted life to be how the films were I suppose, sort of like this dream world [...]. The glamour of it, the style of it, the love stories, the everything. (i/v Verity)

Indeed, before YouTube and the internet made the proliferation of images of the past more widespread but more focused to specific channels and sites such as Netflix, it could be said that young people (such as myself growing up in the 1980s) had more chance of being exposed to old series' and films on the three to four TV channels we had to choose from.[21] By referencing representations of the past, individuals are expressing mythical versions of past glamour for present purposes as well as drawing attention to the fact of representation and artifice. These constructions also frequently draw attention to the fact that they are a performance and representation rather than real, static or *specific* past. This happens through frequently tapping into a hyperbole of style and calling up

[21] In addition to the re-runs of old series such as *Happy Days* and *I Love Lucy*, Channel 4 also produced a run of TV films which were frequently period dramas, such as the 1950s-set *Wish You Were Here* (1987) and others explored by Paul Giles (1993).

a hyper-real fantasy Fifties of old films and glamour photographs that borders on pastiche as conceived by Richard Dyer as 'always an imitation of an imitation' (2006, p.2).

The conflict between imitation in the present, and the idea of provenance of the past also illustrates that Fifties lifestyles are frequently engaged in exposing the past-present relation rather than a static, 'unprogressive' nostalgia. Many of the people I spoke to, while they talk about 'authenticity', actually have a more fluid approach to the provenance of their clothing and collections. For example, Verity mentioned recognising Massey in the documentary, *Time Warp Wives*, and commented:

> Actually if you look round the bits where they go round the [Massey's] house, I'm like 'I've got that, I know that's from Ikea' or 'I've got that, and I know where that's from'. […] I think everything is definitely with a 50s theme but whether that's new or old that doesn't matter. I don't know, it makes it sound like I'm not really into it but it's what I live and die for, it's my absolute love my absolute passion, but you know, you're supposed to have fun with your passions […] I think, if you can get it and it's authentic, brilliant. If you can't, it doesn't matter! You're not going to get hung up on it. […] We've got the radiogram and the couple of bars and stuff like that but then I've got an Ikea unit... It doesn't bother me. (i/v Verity)

It appears that even Massey's immaculate 'time capsule' home is not immune to reflecting the wider present popularity of the imitation of 1950s styles in everyday home stores such as Ikea. Verity's comments here reflect the fact that collecting Fifties artefacts and memorabilia is frequently a leisure activity and a hobby for the present, not to be taken too seriously. There is often a contradictory relationship with an idea of authenticity, as Verity describes her 'passion' but defends herself against being seen as too 'hung up on it'. As with dress, though 'authenticity' comes up semantically again and again, there is often a contradictory relationship with the term. Practicality, technology, and

using collecting practices for the *present* are not forgotten. Authenticity in the sense of a static, museum-like adherence to period accuracy is unimportant to most of the people I spoke to.

Indeed, in a similar way with dress, the notion of being 'comfortable' and 'feeling good' came up frequently in my interviews in relation to collecting and interior décor. Fifties lifestyles become more about a way of expressing oneself through lifestyle aesthetics, but it is a choice in the present, not time travel, as for Verity:

> I think that for a lot of people, especially when they go 'oh so do you go out dancing like the 50s?'. 'Yeah, my house is all done like it!' and like you were saying they instantly think you live in this funny little 50s bubble and you know, you have nothing to do with the outside world, only do 50s things and only must drink 50s tea and, all this stuff and it's just not like that! I mean I definitely do live my life you know, like heavily into the 50s but that's it, *into* the 50s. (i/v Verity)

Similarly with Donna's mixture of lounge décor, some perhaps from the 1950s and some potentially from other eras, this mixture of styles is about expressing creativity of taste and a uniqueness for the *present*:

> This table used to be my Nan's, I'm not sure, this could be 60s. But I remember this when I was little she had it in her home in London. A lot of my cat ornaments are probably 50s ones, yeah. I really like that too, being creative with your furniture by just buying lots of things and just putting them all together. […] It makes it more individual and homely somehow rather than having everything brand new. (i/v Donna)

Donna also illustrates how the use of past styles is frequently not just an abstract past but has a connection to personal histories and family. Furthermore, decorating ones home in styles of the past, as discussed in relation to clothing and appearance, can be an expression of difference in relation to present tastes as well as a way of communicating the self and a person's individuality. Similarly Emma expresses how she embraced more broadly Fifties style into her lifestyle when she moved to Brighton and moved

into her own flat which looks to mid-century style: a teak and glass sideboard, abstract patterned tile-topped coffee table (similar to Donna's), leather sofas with geometric-pattern cushions and bamboo-print wallpaper (echoing the American 'Pacific' style reflected by the shop Paradise Garage):

> I've always had this similar haircut and always worn similar clothes to this but not really sort of embraced the whole thing […] and having a flat of my own which I think […] being able to do it how I wanted to do it and finally kind of get things how I wanted them to be. 'Cause you can't put this wallpaper up in a rented flat. (i/v Emma)

So part of Emma's use of Fifties style is an appreciation of certain aesthetics and a way of expressing her identity through her own space. I will further explore the link between authenticity and the self in Chapter 3, but for now I use these examples to challenge the idea of styles of the past as necessarily just being about a retreat into the past – they are utilised in the pursuit of a satisfying lifestyle needs in the present. The emphasis here is on personal enjoyment, the discovery of new objects and then treasuring them once you find them – such as Verity's radiogram of which she is so proud. Verity reveals the element of choice involved in her interest in the dress and cultural objects of the 1950s as an expression of her preferences and tastes rather than being backward or rejecting of the present. Even Joanne Massey, the 'time warp wife' of the documentary and *Yours* article, was dismayed as being selectively portrayed in the media as somehow 'stuck' in the past:

> More than once Joanne has been portrayed as a simpering housewife happy for a pat on the head from Kevin as she sends him off to work with a peck on the cheek and a jam sandwich. Her bleakest moment came when she featured in a Channel 4 documentary called *Time Warp Wives*, the makers of which made her look something of a fruitcake, albeit a home-baked 1950s one. […] 'They never mentioned that I do actually have a job' (Joanne works two days a week at Shugborough Hall).
> ('Why 1950s-loving Joanne is happily stuck in the past', 2009)

Both women reflect a relationship with the past, rather than a wholesale retreat into it. This is also a very *present* kind of consumption that perhaps addresses a more creative way of engaging with capitalism and creating a lifestyle, as Donna points out: 'for my dad, my dad doesn't understand, he's like 'why do you want to go to a car boot and buy all this old stuff, don't you want new things?' But I think for him, because he didn't have much money when he was growing up it was a really special thing to have new things.' (i/v Donna). Donna recognises the generational shift since the 1960s (as highlighted by Angela McRobbie above in relation to fleamarkets) where the second-hand market lost its associations with poverty and became more a desirable source for clothing and collectibles through its association with *present* concerns of recycling as well as the provenance of certain second-hand items.

*Conclusion*

In this chapter I have argued that aspects of the 1950s have emerged as some of the most popular and lasting styles of the past to re-enact through 'retro' practices of fashion, leisure and collecting during the late 1970s into the 2000s. The style of the Fifties is not a replacement for the present, but a response to it, allowing processes of distinction and individuality in the present. I have illustrated that what appears to be a re-enactment of the past through visible everyday practices is in fact using the past as a response to the present.

The dynamics of 'dressing up' in period clothes enables in one way a direct embodied relationship with the past in the form of wearing clothes with historical provenance. However, I have illustrated that the meaning and value attributed to such styles is not limited to 'originals' but that this meaning can transfer to copies and imitations. Wearing Fifties clothing outside of its original

era is also a way of looking different and related to individuals' self-esteem and sense of self in the present. Indeed, while individuals involved in the Fifties revival were quick to avoid looking like they were in 'fancy dress', they often acknowledged a pleasure in being noticed as 'alternative'. Furthermore, sometimes the assembly of past looks and objects appears a little too perfect and becomes a kind of pastiche – indeed, this is sometimes intentional when the wearer/purchaser wants to make an ironic and distinctive statement by assembling anachronistic or contrasting items in the present.

In addition, people engaging in 'vintage' lifestyle and leisure pursuits such as weekenders and partner dancing are not re-enacting the past wholesale. The nostalgia of the British holiday camp is part of the appeal of rockabilly weekenders but combines this with all-night parties, alcohol, and lifestyle shopping. Furthermore, partner dancing appears to affirm the heteronormative rules of yesteryear but is often an adaptation for the present implicating a reflexivity through, for example, the etiquette of dance as well as its historical origins, frequently enabled by online cultures and communities of knowledge exchange and sharing. Indeed this is not limited to dance but to the Fifties scene overall; I found many of my interviewees via 1950s-related Facebook groups and other sites.

Arguably, the interest in Fifties style continues to reveal more about the present than the past, as Janice Winship notes, 'the fascination for fifties style in films and clothes isn't just a hankering for the past – more a way of understanding today' (1986, p.48). The purpose of this chapter has been to unpick notions of re-enactment in Fifties revival culture as lifestyle choices, acknowledging how these weave in and out between both 'subcultural' and

wider popular trends. For example, the opportunities for time travel are now not just limited to specialist music festivals but in the wider tourist market where it is considered desirable to spend a weekend in a 1950s Airstream trailer or classic British caravan. Furthermore, decorating ones home in Fifties style is a popular obsession for both those who love the 1950s as well as a broader audience appealed to by brands from Habitat to Tesco.

I have illustrated that while individuals involved in Fifties revival cultures frequently have strong ideas about authenticity and the past, they are often 're-enacted' through practices that highlight the relationship between the past and present. This problematises straightforward notions around historical authenticity and what constitutes an 'authentic' past (explored further in Chapter 3). While it has its collective codes and distinctions, Fifties revival culture is a lifestyle that is embodied in many different ways as a creative and personal expression of the self to the outside world.

## Chapter Two: Myth, Nostalgia and the Fifties

> It's 2am at the cashier counter in the Gold Coast Casino and Hotel, Las Vegas. An old woman with a blue rinse takes her bucket full of quarters and heads back to her husband who waits, whisky in hand, at the slot machine they've been sitting in all night, just as a girl who's got so many tattoos on her legs I think she's wearing patterned tights walks by. 'Say,' the old lady says to me, taking in my short, black fringe, polka dots and bubblegum-pink stilettos, 'what's with this rockabilly thing goin' on here? Explain it to me.' 'It's like the '50s, only with a twist,' I tell her. The old lady pauses, nods towards the tattooed legs and, pointing a finger in my face, says 'Well honey, it's too much of a twist. It's just about freaking the shit out of us normal folk.' (Wills, 2003, p.18)

As I argued in the last chapter, the engagement with the Fifties as expressed through lifestyle, leisure and visual culture is frequently depicted as a direct re-enactment of the 1950s. Those re-enactments frequently implicate 'Fifties myths': invisible messages and perceptions that resonate about the past through visible objects and symbols associated with collective memory of the 1950s. I have chosen to focus on the idea of myth because it is frequently carried in objects, symbols and stories about the past that are easily recognisable and have collective resonance. However, myth is frequently considered to need challenging because of its potentially suspect provenance which turns history into icons, clichés and stereotypes. For example, Roland Barthes conceived the power of myth as one based on a unified ideology, affirming the beliefs of bourgeois society (1993). Characterising myth as a false manipulation – without rigour or telling the full story – Barthes laments myth as a stultifying and simplifying version of history and meaning: 'in general myth prefers to work with poor, incomplete, images, where the meaning is already relieved of its fat, and ready for signification, such as caricatures, pastiches, symbols, etc.' (p.127). The implication here is that significance is written into a myth without any need for thought or mental processes by the receiver. There

is also importantly a hierarchy of power here in the purpose and creation of myth, as described by Mark Rawlinson: 'Barthes' interrogation of cultural myths is ultimately an exploration or *critique* of *ideology*. […] all ideologies present their core values not as historically contingent but as the opposite: as universal truths. As Barthes argues in relation to myth, what is concealed by ideology is the way in which the most powerful groups in society enforce and maintain their power over others.' (2009, p.91). Myth has often been analysed in terms of this power dynamic and as something to be 'debunked' (such as by Hobsbawm and Roper, 1983). However, myth can be reconfigured in more sympathetic terms as part of the stories we tell about our culture, as well as part of the process of building collective historical consciousness (as explored in Samuel and Thompson, eds., 1990).[22]

I suggest that in the Fifties revival myths of the 1950s are used in a kind of bricolage which brings together not a 'universal truth' image of the 1950s, but one characterised by mismatched symbols, tension and debate. Furthermore, as Rawlinson notes (with specific reference to representations of myth in the American 1950s) that Barthes' writing on myth expresses 'the underlying notion of the concrete or universal subject' (2009, p.71) and does not allow for possible ways out or alternative readings. This rather prescriptive view of the ideology conveyed by myth takes away from individual agency or varying interpretation by individuals on the basis of gender, class or race for example. Furthermore, it can be seen that various myths of the 1950s represented by the Fifties revival frequently contrast and contradict each other. Myths of the 1950s play a

[22] The dichotomy between 'myth' and 'truth' is still a popular trope for discussing the past, as in a popular history book from 2009, Ed Rayner and Ron Stapley's *Debunking History: 152 Popular Myths Exploded*.

particularly important role in the visual representation and physical embodiment of the Fifties because myth gives objects, styles, and places an easily packaged symbolic meaning. This chapter argues that the ideology of myth can be undermined when certain myths and contrasting memories and interpretations of the past collide and seem incompatible in the present. Juliette Wills, the self-confessed 'rockabilly chick' I mentioned in the last chapter, related the anecdote which opened this chapter about a visit to the Viva Las Vegas weekender in 2003 for the *Mirror* newspaper. The old lady with the blue rinse presumably lived through the actual 1950s, but this new version that Wills represents appears to her, to draw on David Lowenthal (1985), 'a foreign country'. The Fifties revival – '50s with a twist' – version of the 1950s creates chasms between those that lived through the time, and those that did not, and by extension, opens up space for the idea of myth as a social negotiation, and up for contestation.

Myths can be applied to history in relation to defining national identity, 'invented traditions' and 'imagined communities'.[23] Here I relate it more to the collective memory associated with the Fifties in the form of popular cultural myths in the form of Fifties objects and 'values': the 'domestic goddess', streamlined American cars, glamour, the teenager, social cohesion and community spirit. In popular memory, myths are frequently coupled with nostalgic feelings of looking back to a rose-tinted past through certain objects or symbols. This is expressed in popular memory through shared, collective, iconic memories, such as the 'American Fifties' conceived by Christine Sprengler as 'Nostalgia's privileged object' (2009, p.39). The era has been re-

[23] As in Hobsbawm and Ranger, eds., 1983, and Anderson, 2006.

imagined in visual and mythical ways perhaps due to 'the first generation to have grown up *immersed* in popular culture within the home. […] the famously self-mythologizing 'baby boom' generation' (Jones, McCarthy and Murphy eds. 2011, p.5). Even historians such as Arthur Marwick have characterised the historical 'tone' of the 1950s through broad myths and totems; a set of 'values' in opposition to his characterisation of the explosive cultural revolution of the 1960s:

> rigid social hierarchy; subordination of women to men and children to parents; repressed attitudes to sex; racism; unquestioning respect for authority in the family, education, government, the law, and religion, and for the nation-state, the national flag, the national anthem; Cold War hysteria; a strict formalism in language, etiquette, and dress codes; a dull and cliché-ridden popular culture, most obviously in popular music with its boring big bands and banal ballads. (Marwick 1999, p.3)

Indeed, more recently in popular history, Jessica Mann has challenged a present-day 'Fifties Mystique' which suggests that 'Younger women, exhausted by juggling jobs and children, are attracted by the idea of a pre-women's liberation, full-time homemaker's life' where 'distance has led enchantment to the popular view of the life most girls and women led in the 1950s.' (2012, p.7). Hence, it can be seen that there are numerous mythical, taken-for-granted themes and symbols associated with the 1950s, which play into the popular memory of the decade.

In selecting what 'myths' to explore, I have taken my lead from themes occurring from the questionnaire and interview responses of Fifties revivalists, as well as the rhetoric surrounding the Fifties revival in general. My interviewees frequently make reference to these particular myths of 'the Fifties', whether in the form of concepts such as national identity and community spirit, or in the form of mythical figures such as the 'happy housewife' or 'rebellious

teenager'. Popular memory of the 1950s frequently has a mythical, indeterminate quality which is unconcerned with specific historical facts but rather the unity of trends, stereotypes and the experience of generations. Myths of the 1950s have been recalled and deployed as style or consumption practices in different contexts, as I illustrated in the previous chapter with discussions of the 1980s. Expressing myths through style provides a way of communicating a particular mood or attitude for the individual, as seen in the way individuals project themselves as well as in the way Fifties revival cultures are framed in photography and the media, such as the coverage of weekenders I analysed in my last chapter.

My first sections suggest why myth and the Fifties have a close relationship and how myth can reveal the dynamics of the politics of popular memory. I also affirm the relationship of myth with nostalgia in that nostalgia frequently implicates and feeds on mythical symbols and objects. Indeed, this idea of nostalgia as a salve for the present has led to historians such as Malcolm Chase and Christopher Shaw arguing that nostalgia is a product of the enhanced possibilities for reproducing the past through aesthetics. This creates a falsified, simplified 'illustrated history' which 'imposes a set of cultural and aesthetic filters between the reader and the richness, specificity and diversity of the past.' (1989, p.10). The nostalgic past of 'illustrated history' seems aligned with the broad brushed strokes of a mythical past, getting in the way of the 'specificity and diversity' of historical knowledge.

The next sections explore myths of the 1950s that have come out of my research through gender and sexuality; community and race; youth and Americanisation. The first myths of the Fifties I consider are those of gender,

and female gender identity in particular from the ‘Domestic Goddess’ to the ‘Glamorous Pinup’. Many of my interviewees responded with broad ideas about masculinity and femininity in the 1950s, such as Dave P and Verity who answered the question ‘What is it about the 1950s that interests you?’ making specific reference to gender. Dave P commented ‘it may have been the last decade when men looked masculine and women looked feminine in their styles of dress.’ (Dave P q/r) while Verity answered ‘when men were men and women were women! When manners and family were high!’ (Verity q/r). In addition, Martin who responded to my questionnaire accounted for the trend for retro in that, ‘Girls especially [...] now recognise that women looked incredibly sexy and the 50s style is very feminine and flattering.’ (Martin q/r). There are many tensions here between myths of the Fifties as ‘simpler’ in terms of gender identity, innocent but also sexy. I argue that, rather than being wholehearted yearnings for a return to the gender values of the past, conflicting and contrasting symbols of gender in the Fifties create contrasting myths of the past in the service of the present. Furthermore, an exploration of representations of retro sexuality can offer exciting opportunities for fantasy and identity play through stories of the past.

Secondly, my interviewees often refer to ideas around community spirit in the 1950s which are also often told in relation to a perceived ‘lack’ of community today. These are often tied up with the revival of craft and tradition, as well as reflections on race, prejudice and the imagined 1950s. The final section considers the ways that Fifties revival styles today refer to myths of America and youth, frequently reworking images of ‘young rebels’ with popular looks being quiffs, denim and leather jackets. Related to this, I account for the ways

that representations of the Fifties are frequently more influenced by American advertising and popular culture than historical accounts of Britain in the 1950s. I suggest that myth is used fundamentally for present purposes, but also that the range of different myths and meanings brought together in the Fifties revival create a picture of the past defined by conflict and tension, rather than a harmonious vision of the past.

*Myth and the Fifties: Sex, baking and bunting*

I have chosen to explore popular memory and the use of Fifties styles in this way because nostalgic myths have emerged from my research and conversations about reimagining the Fifties. Myth has an important role to play in perceptions of the 1950s because firstly, myths are frequently deployed in popular historical representation of 'the era' or 'the decade'. Myths are powerful codes which can be easily packaged and referred to in order to mark out distinctions between broad moments of historical time. However, this dynamic also often reveals the tensions of the era as contrasting myths collide and contradict one another. Myth seems to be a way of exploring the contrasts and tensions of past and present in a way which challenges the idea of there being just one single story or narrative about the past, instead affirming the idea of a more collective participation in the construction of historical knowledge. Finally, the representation of collective memory through myths of the 1950s is frequently participated in *for the present* in a way that suggests new meanings and politics.

Mythical symbols associated with the 1950s often create a contradictory view of the past, rather than a static one. For instance, the popularity of the pin-up Bettie Page – who often came up as a style icon for my female interviewees

– has been mythologised in various books and a biopic. Richard Foster has called Page 'Queen of the Pinups' (1997, p.8), whose trademark fringe, fetish wear and 'country-girl smile' (p.183) were resurrected in the 1980s and have gained cult appeal among 'counterculture types' (ibid.). Her image has influenced rockabilly style; in the last chapter, Donna mentions women 'start getting a fringe cut' which is a reference to the way Page's hairstyle has influenced the Fifties revival. Potentially the reason she is popular is that she represents a fissure between two competing myths – she symbolises a unique trailblazer against alternative Fifties myths of buttoned up, sexless repression.

Mythical versions of the Fifties are also particularly popular due to the aesthetic and embodied nature of popular memory of the Fifties which taps into myths carried by style icons, easily recognisable fashion trends and symbols. In contrast to the embodiment of myths of 1950s sexuality through Bettie Page style is the re-enactment activities of the Fifties which focus on activities of craft and baking. These are often depicted as more 'innocent' traditions of the past, as in the report which suggested that 'wholesome activities - once the preoccupation of post-war Britons - are being rediscovered and reinvented by young professionals intent on spearheading a 1950s revival of dinner dances and knitting circles.' (Thistlewaite, 2009). This was foreshadowed in 2000 with the publication of Nigella Lawson's *How To Be A Domestic Goddess*, combining middle-class 'foodie' culture with myths of Fifties domesticity. Another example of the 'homemade' trend is the fact that Vogue Patterns reissued original vintage sewing patterns with 'new look' designs that referenced iconic looks of the 1940s and 1950s in particular. This move revisits the days before off-the-peg fashion began to provide access to the latest styles

through labels such as Mary Quant and Biba (McRobbie, 1998, p.37). On the subject of domesticity and retro baking and how it relates to nostalgic myths of the Fifties, in 2014 Tom Whyman took to the *Guardian* to critique what he saw as a malaise of nostalgia, retro and infantilism in British culture through the symbol of the cupcake:

> The cupcake is vintagey and twee. It invokes a sense of wholesomeness and nostalgia, albeit for a past never experienced, a more perfect past, just as vintage-style clothing harks back to an idealised image of the 1920s through 60s that never existed. […] we see how the restrictive shape of the cupcake, its cold and uniform neatness, matches up with the infantilising elements of twee cupcakey tropes: it is only possible, as an adult, to remain a cognitive child if you are a child without sticky fingers, drily conforming to a prescribed set of rules.' (Whyman, 2014)

There is a sense here that the cupcake becomes an intellectually deadening symbol of the past and retro uses symbols in such a way as to disable critique or debate. I aim to somewhat complicate this view by illustrating that Fifties revival culture can use myth and nostalgia in a more dynamic way than this rather pessimistic account suggests.

Other ways in which the Fifties are called up in mythical ideas about tradition is through the depiction of what it means to be British. A series of commemorations through 2011 to 2012 were focal points for calling up myths of British national identity and made reference to post-war Britain: the 2011 Festival of Britain anniversary/Southbank Celebrates event and the London Olympics and Elizabeth II's Diamond Jubilee in 2012. 2011 saw a colourful commemoration to the 60th anniversary of the Festival of Britain descend on London's South Bank, filled with attractions including a giant straw fox, the world's longest bunting, and an artificial sandy beach complete with brightly painted beach huts (Jones, 2011). Making links with the original 1951 Festival,

these exhibits arguably conjure up images of the mythical post-war Britain: the street party and the classic seaside holiday.[24]

Historian Nick Thomas has observed that the contrasts between myths and totems of the 1950s have led to the era having something of an 'image problem':

> The 1950s have become synonymous with growing prosperity and 'having it so good', shared values, respect for authority, social cohesion, community, consensus, meat and two veg suburbanism and, above all, happy families; an aspirational but conformist environment personified by the fully-made-up middle-class housewife in a shiny new kitchen with all the latest labour-saving gadgets. (2008, p.227)

The idea of conformity collides with tensions regarding sex, poverty, the role of the State and an emerging popular mass culture. As Thomas notes, the 1950s were also:

> the period of Cold War anxiety, red scares, growing disquiet about the threat of nuclear destruction, and an ongoing debate about gender roles. This was a decade of both conformity and 'rebels without a cause', conservatism and rapid social change, smugness and moral panic, of Doris Day and Marilyn Monroe. (p.228).

Thomas explores the historiography of the 1950s, suggesting that the limited and sweeping assessments of the 1950s as an era sandwiched in between the Second World War and the apparent social revolutions of the 1960s have been superseded by 'new avenues of investigation […] which acknowledges, embraces and explores the contradictions in the evidence' (pp.228-229) such as works by Claire Langhamer (2006), Peter Hennessy (2007) and David Kynaston (2007).

I use Thomas' analysis to highlight the way the 1950s have been perceived in broad historical terms which has played into the popular perception of 'the Fifties'. Thomas mentions 'happy families', 'conformist environment' and

[24] As explored in depth by John Walton, 2000.

'happy housewife' as myths which are often collectively associated with the Fifties. Thomas also suggests the 'contradictions' in the historical evidence of the era, contradictions which are also played out in the contradictory use of myths in the Fifties revival. Along with more scholarly historiography, retro revivals and popular perceptions of the past play a role in what has been remembered or forgotten in popular memory of the 1950s. Rather than looking at nostalgic myths as 'untruths', my analysis can illuminate the historical account of the 1950s in terms of exploring history as a form of communication and participation. An unpicking of Fifties myths explores history in Samuel's sense as a 'social form of knowledge', illustrating how stories about the past are created and deployed for the present.

Reconsidering myth

Roland Barthes also allows myth a storytelling function, stating: 'myth is a system of communication. [...] a message.' (1993, p.109). However, in Barthes' terms there is little room for agency in myth, acting as a seemingly one-way form of communication from producers to consumers where collective resonances are tapped into for set ideological purposes. For Barthes, mythical objects carry more with them than their use value; they can become tied up with an instant wider significance or resonance for a collective culture, such as wine for the French, 'a totem-drink, corresponding to the milk of the Dutch cow or the tea ceremonially taken by the British Royal Family.' (p.58). Myths often speak in generalities, are seldom proven or backed up with evidence, they just *are*. Barthes finds that myth upholds the values of bourgeois society, using the significance of objects to push forward clear messages and aspirations about culture and nation. His aim is to counter the taken-for-granted signification of

myths and debunk the apparently 'natural' status of myth: 'myth is a type of speech chosen by history: it cannot possibly evolve from the 'nature' of things'' (p.110). Myth's meaning is constructed in such a way that it seems natural when in fact it is often formed through selection and juxtaposition, such as Barthes' example of the photograph of a black soldier saluting in front of the French flag (p.115). Crucially, myth is 'depoliticised language' (p.143), its significance and meaning so subtle and taken-for-granted, leading to Barthes to associate myth with the 'right-wing' (p.149) because it maintains control and the status quo rather than offering debate or struggle.

From a semiotic tradition of 'uncovering' and 'decoding' signs, Barthes' work is an example of the thinking emerging from the 1950s which can shed light on myths of the 1950s themselves. *Mythologies* was originally published in 1957, tapping into a growing suspicion about the proliferation of images in visual media and the way they carried messages and ideologies.[25] I do not deny the powerful nature of myth and follow Barthes in terms of considering myth's significance through symbols and objects as socially formed (not evolved from the 'nature of things' as described above). However, the aim of this chapter is to consider the actual *use* of myths and the way that this can counter the idea of myths as only a kind of deception or to affirm any one particular ideology. I also consider myth as political; when used and deployed through nostalgic objects it can reveal contrasting meanings and fracture a simple narrative of the past.

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[25] For example, Vance Packard's *Hidden Persuaders*, also first published in 1957, responded to a suspicion of mass advertising and the way marketing was using psychological techniques and subliminal messages to tap into peoples' unconscious desires. Indeed, the first two episodes of Adam Curtis' documentary *Century of the Self* is an insightful exploration of the influence of psychoanalysis on advertising during the mid-Twentieth century, itself using popular memory and archive footage to explore the politics and anxieties surrounding this (BBC Two, March 2002).

It is worth noting that myth has resonance in the ancient sense, as explored by Karen Armstrong (2005), from the rituals and graves of Neanderthal man and stories of gods and goddesses. Focusing on the spiritual aspects of myth as stories related to religion and the human imagination, Armstrong explores the victory of 'logos' (reason and logic) over 'mythos' (spirituality and imagination) in Western modernity since the 16th century (p.125). My discussion of myth in this chapter is not in this spiritual, religious sense, but does have similarities with the qualities of myth that Armstrong raises. As in the logos/mythos dichotomy, myths can often be critiqued as deception against 'facts' and accusations of passivity, even Armstrong views newer 'mythical objects' such as Elvis Presley and Princess Diana with some distain: 'there is something unbalanced about this adulation. The myth of the hero was not intended to provide us with icons to admire, but was designed to tap into the vein of heroism in ourselves' (p.141). However, while some aspects of Armstrong's analysis of myth are pertinent to my point here – such as myth as a site of imagination and play – I argue that these 20th and 21st century myths of the Fifties are not necessarily just consumed or admired, but utilised and participated in *for* the present . Unlike Armstrong's identification of a 'wrong' kind of myth which is associated with icons and passive adulation, I argue that there is an agency and politics to the use of myths within popular culture. While myth may in one sense remain those taken-for-granted stereotypes and easy to package parts of history, the recall and actual use of 1950s myths in the present is frequently done with agency, pleasure, imagination and often results in debate, discussion and potentially the undermining of myth itself.

Raphael Samuel has offered an alternative approach to how myths operate in popular memory and that their deployment can actually be considered part of the democratic construction of history. As I explored in the introduction to this thesis, Samuel has illustrated the roots of popular memory as the exchange and passing on of knowledge through the folk tradition of storytelling. From this oral tradition myths play a bigger role than the historian's cold 'facts':

> Popular memory is on the face of it the very antithesis of written history. It eschews notions of determination and seizes instead on omens, portents and signs. It measures change genealogically, in terms of generations rather than centuries, epochs or decades. It has no developmental sense of time, but assigns events to the mythicized 'good old days' (or 'bad old days') of workplace lore, or the 'once upon a time' of the storyteller. (1994, p.6)

While this folk form of passing on tales, experience and lore may not have had the rigours of the professional historian, for Samuel it formed part of a more egalitarian constitution of knowledge than the 'assumption that knowledge filters downwards.' (1994, p.4). If history in popular memory is a construction by the collective, it follows then that it is a kind of chaos of contradictions, both celebrating on the one hand generalities and sweeping changes but also elevating up eccentricities and unique experiences. The approach of this project aims to assert the value of studying historical knowledge as constructed through various popular and contradictory myths of the Fifties and how this can inform the study of the politics of the past in the present. As Samuel states, popular memory 'deals in broad-brushed contrasts between 'now' and 'then', 'past' and 'present', the new fangled and the old fashioned' while at the same time 'it prefers the eccentric to the typical; the sensational to the routine.' (ibid.).

In this sense it shares many of these qualities with myth.

*Nostalgia and the Fifties*

Nostalgia plays an important part in popular memory's use of mythical symbols of the past. Myth and nostalgia can be linked through being bound up with the idea of an 'imaginary' past as a realm of fantasy and comfort. Writing in the 1970s, sociologist Fred Davis describes how, coined by a physician in 1688, nostalgia was originally used to describe a 'painful condition […] a painful yearning to return home.' (p.1). His study recognised the past-present tension within nostalgia, explaining nostalgia as a reaction 'to the era of social upheaval that preceded it' (1979, px). Recognising the potential for a collective nostalgia (rather than one just related to a personal homesickness), he describes the 'nostalgia orgy' of the 1970s as being expressed through objects, fashions and fads such as 'the movie mania of the thirties, the next the drive-in automobile pubescence of the fifties, the next after that the bobbed hair, bell-bottomed abandon of the twenties' (p.107). These mythical moments of time recast in the nostalgic present offered 'the means for holding onto and reaffirming identities which had been badly bruised by the turmoil of the times' (p.107). Indeed, it is convenient to suggest that the vogue for the Fifties revival is some kind of return to a nostalgic haven – an alternative 'age of austerity' and more concrete identities and traditions.

However, the interpretation of nostalgia has developed beyond the notion of nostalgia as a refuge from the stresses of the present such as those studies examining the interaction between memory and those worlds of imagination created by film and television such as Cook (2005), Sprengler (2009), and Holdsworth (2011). Historians have also engaged with nostalgia's function

rather than just bemoaning its representations, such as David Lowenthal's focus on nostalgia's 'presentness' – a reaction to a sense of loss and the pace of change in the present day (1998, pp.5 – 6). On the subject of presentness, Angela McRobbie refuted the idea of nostalgia altogether in her suggestion that second-hand dressing styles utilise something new rather than being a total return to the past:

> it might be argued that these styles are neither nostalgic in essence not without depth. Nostalgia indicates a desire to recreate the past faithfully, and to wallow in such mythical representations. Nostalgia also suggests an attempt at period accuracy, as in a costume drama. [...] This style is marked out rather by a knowingness, a wilful anarchy and an irrepressible optimism, as indicated by colour, exaggeration, humour and disavowal of the conventions of adult dress.
> (1989, pp.41-2)

McRobbie here indicates my link of 'mythical representations' with nostalgia. While McRobbie views nostalgia as avowedly backward-looking, I suggest that the 'knowingness' and humour she highlights is not necessarily incompatible with the use of nostalgic looks, myths and styles. Nostalgia as a set of practices and feelings which use 'mythical representations' can still be a mode of engaging with the *present*.

Most notably, the dynamics of nostalgia have also been investigated in particular as a condition of postmodernity (for example Jameson 1992 and Hutcheon, 1998) and in studies of collective remembering (and forgetting), such as Svetlana Boym's (2001). I will touch on other works at various points during this project, but for this chapter I engage with Boym's discussions of nostalgia in particular. She describes how the medical origins of nostalgia as a sickness identified its triggers as significant objects and cultural artefacts that sparked off a 'reaction' in the afflicted (Boym, 2001, p.4). Indeed, the centrality of objects and material culture to nostalgia has not gone away, and nostalgia works

between past and present to gives certain items (such as the jukebox, American diner, Ridgway's 'Homemaker' ceramics), 'figures' (such as the 1950s housewife) or 'concepts' (such as community spirit) a mythical quality.

Furthermore, Boym has dealt with the dynamics of nostalgia by describing it as two kinds of feeling: 'restorative', a conservative and static view of the past, and 'reflective', one that is creative with the past and raises questions (p.41). Boym is quick to point out that 'unreflected nostalgia breeds monsters' (pxvi), illustrating some of the same reservations about nostalgia as Barthes in that it can create a falsified version of history. However, there is a progressive potential for nostalgia: 'Nostalgia is not always about the past; it can be retrospective but also prospective. Fantasies of the past determined by needs of the present have a direct impact on realities of the future.' (pxvi). Indeed, the idea of reflective nostalgia is a pertinent one for my analysis, as conversations around myths of the 1950s with my interviewees have illustrated a past and present dynamic which does involve reflection. This is enabled by the growing focus on the visual mythical past and its use in popular culture in the form of symbols and objects. Nostalgic feelings are carried through objects, reproductions, antiques and souvenirs of the past which often have their own mythical symbolic meaning about the past for the present. The availability of these objects creates a culture where it is potentially possible to feel 'nostalgia without lived experience or collective historical memory' (Appadurai qtd. in Boym, 2001, p.38).

Indeed, while all but one of my interviewees was not old enough to have lived through the actual 1950s, they are tapping into a shared cultural memory of the Fifties through mythical meanings carried through objects. While recent

scholars such as Boym still focus on a kind of hierarchy of nostalgia between what is acceptable (progressive, reflective) and not acceptable (conservative, backward-looking, escapist), I move away from these hierarchies and instead focus on the interaction of many kinds of nostalgia with myths, popular memory and *the present*. These discussions on the dynamics of nostalgia will continue in Chapters 3 and 4, particularly in relation to nostalgia as a simplified rose-tinted looking back to the past as well as the tensions between conservative and progressive politics.

The Fifties revival frequently encourages an 'embodiment' of the past in a personal and cultural way through the activities of 'dressing up', leisure, dance, retro food, and music explored in the last chapter. The particular objects that are selected frequently have a mythical quality, a quickly-referenced meaning in collective memory. Related to the playing out of these myths quite literally 'on the body' is through myths of gender and sexuality. It can be seen that the different representations of gender are frequently contradictory and while they often have proven historical origins they also take on an iconic life of their own, expanded by fantasy and the power of taking things out of context. Indeed, many of my interviewees got their dominant images of the Fifties from old photographs, Hollywood films and magazines – sources frequently depicting and implicating the iconic, fantasy and mythical. Barthes himself explored the role of visual media and gender in magazines and the cinema in some of his case studies such as his depiction of *Elle* magazine as 'a real mythological treasure' (1993, p.78) and his exploration of the power of the cinematic image in 'The Face of Garbo' (p.56). I argue that some of the most powerful icons related to the idea of 'the Fifties' are those related to the position of women and

they often fluctuate between extremes and contradictions. The next section will explore the use of myths of the Fifties in relation to femininity and sexuality.

*The Fifties housewife and re-imagining domesticity*

The myth of the Fifties housewife is resurrected both as both a warning against nostalgia (such as by feminists, explored further below) but also reclaimed in fantasies of pleasure and choice. All related to present-day concerns and desires, in some ways the 'Fifties housewife' has emerged together with the middle-class revival of tradition and craft in the popularity of a 'foodie' and 'homemade' lifestyle culture. A retro eschewing of convenience foods has been advocated by the lush tomes of Nigel Slater, Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall and Nigella Lawson, who consistently highlight the benefit and pleasure of cooking from scratch and Lawson particularly capitalising on the potential pleasures of 'retro'. Furthermore, second-hand and 'traditional' handicrafts such as knitting and sewing have also been elevated as desirable pastimes for women by modern hobby groups such as 'Stitch and Bitch' and in lifestyle programmes such as Channel 4's *Kirsty's Homemade Home* and BBC Two's *The Great British Sewing Bee*. In an apparently contrasting representation, Fifties myths of glamour and sexuality have been popularised in burlesque and vintage lingerie revivals, as well as revival fashions which call up a whole host of iconic garments from high-school circle skirts to vampish 'wiggle' dresses. Shops like *Vivien of Holloway* focus on the iconic and mythical which are held up as accessible styles to try on with an emphasis on pleasure and choice:

> With period perfect fabrics and cuts only slightly adapted from genuine vintage styles, in Vivien of Holloway you can be transformed into a cheesecake pin-up, a femme fatale, a saucy Mad Men-era office girl, or a WWII working girl – the choice is yours! (Vivien of Holloway website)

Indeed, sometimes the irony inherent in the resurrections of images of Fifties women allow the two extremes of housewife and pin-up to merge, as in the mingling of burlesque and baked goods in London's 'Time For Tease' burlesque events or the imagery in the designer '50s housewives' wallpaper of Dupenny which combines domesticity with burlesque titillation.

Image 11: Dupenny wallpaper (image from Dupenny website)

I argue that retro uses various mythical images together in a practice of 'bricolage', piecing together and reassembling mythical objects of the Fifties in a fantasy for the present. Within the Fifties revival there is a commotion of

contrasting ideologies which stand side by side as representing 'the Fifties'; for example the Fifties myth of 'wholesomeness' (represented by tradition, craft and baking) can be combined with images of 'sexiness' (such as pin-up imagery). I argue that the schisms between the contrasting ideologies of these myths open up space to illustrate the inconsistency of myth, its multifarious nature, and allow it to be deconstructed.

Firstly, I will explore some of the broad myths of the housewife and domesticity which have been utilised and associated with an idea of 'the Fifties'. In accounting for their interest in images of the 1950s, my female respondents frequently expressed an interest in 'traditional' domestic activities. Female questionnaire respondents sometimes mentioned taking an interest in knitting, sewing and crafts when asked if there were any specific hobbies or activities related to their interest in the past; for example, one respondent described recreating old styles through using vintage sewing and knitting patterns. Two of my female interviewees, Donna and Verity, did not make reference to crafts but expressed an enthusiasm for home cooking, baking and housewifery. Donna commented, 'I've always wanted to get married and have children. And I want to do my other creative things but I've always quite liked the idea of being a housewife.' (Donna i/v). Verity, living with her partner Dave and their son Jake, is committed to the idea of being a full time mother:

> When I found out I was pregnant, that was it, I gave up my career, I gave up everything to have my son because, and I was adamant I wasn't going to go back to work until at least he'd started school...when I met Dave and had Jake everything changed completely, you know, I did want to be that little woman at home and, I really enjoy it. And he wasn't that sort of man before and now he really enjoys providing and stuff like that, you know. (Verity i/v)

For Verity, this attitude seems in part attributed to her fondness for the Fifties, as she refers to the potentially glamorous 'art' of the Fifties housewife: 'I like to swan around with the hoover in high heels at home and, you know, I always like to look presentable when he comes home and, stuff like that. And that is definitely a lost art and that's definitely something that's inspired me from the Fifties' (Verity i/v).

This apparently rose-tinted view of the Fifties housewife, influenced perhaps by the picturesque imagery of glamour and baking referenced above, has elsewhere been countered as dangerous nostalgia. For example, journalist Liz Hodgkinson blamed mediated images of the Fifties (illustrated by photographs from the popular American HBO series *Mad Men* set in Madison Avenue of the 1960s rather than the 1950s)[26] for giving women an image of the era as a 'super-glamorous time when life was simpler and people were nicer' (Hodgkinson, 2012). She counters this with experiences from her own upbringing in the actual 1950s, where 'the grim reality is quite different from the airbrushed, Photoshopped, cocktail-sipping version presented to us today — particularly if you're a woman.' (ibid.) Hodgkinson was responding to Jessica Mann's book, *The Fifties Mystique*, which amended the title of Betty Friedan's famous feminist text to try and counter apparent female nostalgia for the 1950s: 'Younger women, exhausted by juggling jobs and children, are attracted by the idea of a pre-women's liberation, full-time homemaker's life [...]. Distance has lent enchantment to the popular view of the life most girls and women led in the 1950s' (Mann, 2012, p.7).

[26] The popularity of *Mad Men* has spawned academic interest in analysing the series' significance in terms of the politics of representing the past and its meaning as a source of popular history, for example Goodlad, Kaganovsky and Rushing (eds.), 2013, and De Groot, 2011.

Indeed, the strong collective memory of women 'entrapped' in the 1950s by the totems of family, motherhood and housekeeping are not without historical provenance[27]. These are explored by Mann in an anti-Fifties nostalgia text that offers a popular British perspective on what has already been explored in American responses to idealised images of the 1950s such as those by Winnie Breines (1992) and Stephanie Coontz (1992). The 'young, white and miserable' narrative of women in the 1950s has become a powerful and dominating image, where aspirations are limited to becoming the 'trapped housewife' of Betty Friedan. Friedan painted a picture of the perfect all-American housewife being eaten away inside by doubt, yearning and a lack of fulfilment:

> Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night, she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question: 'Is this all?' (1965, p.13)

Indeed, the 'We Can Do It'[28] narrative of women in the USA and UK going out to work for the war effort during the 1940s is often countered by the story that many went 'back to the home' when their husbands returned, sowing the seeds for the 'domestic goddess' and Betty Friedan's 'happy housewife heroine'.[29] In

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[27]Of course, there is also robust historical provenance to the interpretation of the 1950s as a time of oppressive social constraints. While Stephen Brooke asserts that the 1940s and 1950s saw 'a 'modern', 'silent' transformation' (2011, p.145) taking place in sexual politics which is part of the historical continuity of gender and sexuality, it took until 1967 for more liberal attitudes on gender and sexuality to be introduced in law. 1967 saw the passing of the Abortion Bill allowing women more legal and secure options, the National Health Service (Family Planning) Act which enabled the NHS to give sexual health advice to all women regardless of age and marital status, and homosexual acts were decriminalised between individuals in private and over 21 (pp.146 – 147). Richard Davenport-Hines has also explored public attitudes to female independence and sexual autonomy, during the 1950s and even well into the so-called 'permissive' 1960s: 'To challenge what many inwardly knew to be nonsense was simply not respectable. […] There were glares if a solitary woman went to a bar or restaurant: it was assumed that she was on the game.' (2013, p.113).

[28] The iconic Second World War propaganda poster featuring a female worker with rolled-up sleeve has been endlessly appropriated, frequently for feminist purposes. (See Sharp 2011).

[29] In a challenge to this myth, Selina Todd's research has reclaimed the agency of working-class women in playing a role in work and social life in England *prior* to 1945 rather than surging into the workforce during the Second World War (2005).

response to the UK government's cuts to public spending, the Fawcett Society announced a day of action on 19th November 2011 with the slogan, 'Don't Turn Back Time On Women's Equality'. They argued that cuts in public services were disproportionately affecting women more than men, widening the pay gap between the genders and increasing the numbers of women being forced to give up work due to cuts in childcare support (Davies, 2011). Alongside a rally in London, women up and down the country were encouraged to host their own awareness-raising events, in the form of a 'Don't Turn Back Time Tea Party'. Both the rally and the tea parties were unflatteringly associated with the 1950s, as marchers were encouraged by The Fawcett Society to dress up in 1950s clothes, aimed at telling David Cameron not to let austerity measures 'turn back time' on rights for women (Davies, 2011). Banners at the demonstration were designed with a cheerful cartoon of a perky housewife and participants were encouraged to dress up in headscarves, frocks, rubber gloves and handcuffs to chain themselves 'to the kitchen sink' (ibid.). This exercise in dressing up utilised the strong collective perception and visual markers of the trapped Fifties housewife.

Social historians have since offered a more nuanced view on female experience in the 1950s, such as Claire Langhamer's work on attitudes and experiences of marriage and domesticity in post-war Britain (2005, 2007).[30] While Langhamer echoes the Fawcett Society's 'kitchen-sink-chain' narrative in noting the physical demands of post-war female domestic labour, she illustrates

[30] Other reappraisals of women's roles, work and domesticity in the post-war period include Spencer's (2005) research on education, Haggett's (2009) oral histories exploring housewives' depression in the 1950s and 1960s and Giles' (2004) study of domesticity, which considers that many women found satisfaction in the domestic role and also takes a further look back at the longer trajectory of the meanings of the housewife before the post-war period.

that dissatisfaction with this had emerged in the 1950s themselves, as well as the years preceding:

> as the spread in ownership of labour-saving devices was only partial even at the end of the 1950s, housework remained physically demanding work; work which daughters observed with increasing disdain. [...] Whether we consider the writings of the Angry Young Men or the reflections of those who later benefited from the emergence of 'second wave' feminism in the late 1960s, a construction of 1950s domesticity as oppressive and stultifying has stuck hard...Yet, a desire for a different kind of life is not absent from sources which document girls growing up in the 1940s and, indeed, the preceding decade. (2005, p.358)

Historical research is now bringing out the complex contradictions in the experience of women in the 1950s and I argue that the tensions of historical changes in attitudes are revealed in the way Fifties gender myths are used to make new identities in Fifties revival culture. The aim of this chapter is not to illustrate myth as an 'untruth' against the authenticity of history. Myth is carried through symbols, objects and images – such as the 'Fifties housewife' – that come coupled with invisible resonances and meanings that seem universally, collectively understood by a particular culture. With her reference to the 'Angry Young Men' and late-1960s feminism, Langhamer illustrates the potential reasons why certain prominent perceptions or myths about a particular time can emerge more strongly than other stories – such as the experiences and critiques of individual women about domestic work. The prominence of Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* and 'second-wave' feminism as a movement in the later 1960s and early 1970s could conveniently be polarised as a direct repost to the 1950s as a time of particular oppression of women as with Marwick's 'subordination of women to men' thesis.

Finally, while it is true that certain symbols carry myths of 'the Fifties', they are frequently used in different and interchangeable ways to represent

competing ideologies. The Fifties housewife and domestic goddess are also used in ways that actually undermine the idea of set and narrow gender roles. Myths can be used in contradictory ways to signify different things in different contexts or when assembled with other discourses. There is a self-conscious agency at work to these versions of femininity, which perhaps springs from literacy in popular culture and a touch of irony. The clash between 'perfect' outside appearance and Friedan's inner 'stirring' has been latched onto ironically in later years by a new generation who play with the image of the 'desperate housewife'.[31] The smiling housewife co-opted by the Fawcett Society's placards and publicity is frequently attributed to the Fifties with her soft waved bob and frilly pinny. While the Fawcett Society focus on one aspect of what 'lies beneath' the perfect appearance – dissatisfaction and entrapment – there are other ways that the inner psychology of the Fifties housewife myth have been interpreted and mobilised in the 1990s and 2000s.

The Fifties housewife has been deployed ironically in ways that undermine those perceived notions of the past and gives a subversive voice to images of the past. Anne Taintor's merchandise features perky suburban-looking housewives or glamour girls, emblazoned with sassy slogans such as 'why do dishes when you can do daiquiris?' (Anne Taintor website). The smiling housewives who adorn the inner cover of Nigella Lawson's provocatively titled *How To Be A Domestic Goddess* are tapping into the same cultural perceptions as the Fawcett Society, but this time these perceptions are undermined and interlinked with different meanings for the present. Despite

[31] Indeed, while the title of American TV series *Desperate Housewives* echoes Friedan's idea of the oppressed suburban housewife, Niall Richardson (2006) has explored how the ironic and camp style of the series (referencing the hyper-real women of *The Stepford Wives*) offers the female characters agency and humour.

appearances, Lawson's tome is not full of strict rules for female conduct or an inducement to what she refers to as 'domestic drudgery' (2000, pvii). Lawson exemplifies an ironical tone to the use of the housewife-myth; her dry commentary tips a wink to the contemporary female cook, lampooning strict rules of entertaining, domestic and culinary expectations.[32] Joanne Hollows has explored Nigella Lawson's work as a feminist negotiation of the repressive connotations of domesticity, allowing women to explore identities through fantasy and cooking without it necessarily being oppressive or completely tied up with their self-worth.[33] Lawson used the Fifties housewife to explore the possibilities of subversion and pleasure that images of domesticity could offer women in the 2000s, albeit firmly situated within middle-class frameworks of choice and lifestyle:

> Part of it too is about a fond, if ironic, dream: the unexpressed 'I' that is a cross between Sophia Loren and Debbie Reynolds in pink cashmere cardigan and fetching gingham pinny, a weekend alter-ego...The good thing is, we don't have to get ourselves up in Little Lady drag and we don't have to renounce the world and enter into a life of domestic drudgery. But we can bake a little – and a cake is just a cake, far easier than getting the timing right for even the most artlessly casual of midweek dinner parties. (pvii)

With her 'midweek dinner parties' and 'office' Lawson addressed the aspirational 21st century working woman/mother and offered a way for women to enjoy domesticity and the comforts of the kitchen. The emphasis is firmly on the individual's pleasure in the practice of cooking and baking, and how that makes one feel, rather than *necessarily* preparing food for a husband and family: 'what I'm talking about is not *being* a domestic goddess exactly, but *feeling* like one...' (ibid.).

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[32] Lise Shapiro Sanders has explored fans responses to Nigella and how her appeal depends on 'the domestic goddess as an ironic performance' (2009, p.160).
[33] For more on this see Hollows, 2003.

My interviewees reflect a use of myths to explore both the role of housewife as a job, and as a way into exploring the pleasures of the domestic. Verity accounts for her interest in domesticity and homemaking very much in the context of her son and partner, referring to a general sense of 'the lost art for being [...] a housewife' (Verity i/v):

> There's definitely a lot more choice for women, you know, there's so many more careers. I think that's absolutely fine, I think it's brilliant if women want to work out there [...] but if they're going to stay at home then do it right. Or maybe that's just me. I don't think that that's what women should do but I definitely think it should be an option they *might* think about whereas now it's just not, it's just not something that's ever thought about at all [...]. People that are out of work or they stay at home, they just see it as 'oh I'm just staying at home' they're not thinking 'oh yeah I'm a housekeeper' or things like that. (Verity i/v)

Here it could be said that using the Fifties housewife as a role model is a way for Verity to add value to her role as a housewife and mother. Harking back to a time when she feels housework was valued, for Verity this apparent tradition of the past validates her choice which she sees as a 'full time job'.[34] What this illustrates is that myths from the past, albeit a kind of fantasy, can be used to validate positions in the present. Verity explains that some of her partner's family are disapproving of her not working, 'they just think I sit around at home and do nothing. And I think it probably has helped that we're into the sort of Fifties stuff that his mum has been a lot more accepting with it because I think she gets the ideal that we want' (Verity i/v).

However, an enjoyment of domesticity is also not limited to validating one's position as a full-time homemaker. Donna reflects that her own interest in

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[34] Indeed while Claire Langhamer illustrates the fulfilment some women felt in their domestic work, she also suggests that 'Within an era often defined as one in which the domestic was privileged, the status of domestic work actually fell sharply. Whilst domesticity as imagined in the interwar period was a full-time, modern profession, in the post-war period other pressures drew women outside the home in increasing numbers. […] Moreover, working-class woman's traditional skills of managing, making and budgeting became less valued in an age of consumer goods and rising incomes.' (2005, p.359).

baking and dressing up is more often than not for female friends rather than to please men or the male gaze:

> If ever I make cakes, they're normally for my girlfriends coming round for a cup of tea [...]. And the way I dress, I don't think men nowadays would find what I'm wearing as like the sexiest [...]. I certainly don't feel that I dress to impress men. It's generally girls that appreciate what I wear. (Donna i/v)

Donna relates her enjoyment of baking through female friendship and sociability, while it is her passion for vintage fashion that she reflects in her appearance. With her own vintage clothing business, and some experience of vintage modelling, Donna's appearance is related to her broad interest in vintage styles in terms of her own taste and choice. In anti-nostalgia dialogues like Hodgkinson's, where 1950s experience is compared with modern Fifties retromania, choice is an pivotal factor: 'For while it can be fun having a go at hand-knitting your own jumpers and turning worn-out collars on shirts, it's quite another matter when these tasks are an absolute necessity, as they were for many women in the Fifties.' (Hodgkinson, 2012). Indeed, the use of Fifties gender identities by my interviewees is frequently used selectively and underscored by a sense of free choice and play – like Lawson's domestic goddess they can try on these identities in a knowing way without constraint or social expectation. For example, Verity loves the convention of men asking her to dance – 'it does make you feel unbelievably girly' – but she is also independent, running her own successful vintage hair and make-up company (Verity i/v). She revels in domestic tasks and taking care of the home, but it is clear that she has *chosen* to perform the role of a housewife and asserts herself in that role. Rather than directly compare what the past was really like with these present imaginations, it is more useful to think about the effect of

deploying myths of the past in the present, and how they help to explore the past and reveal the contradictions and tensions in interpreting the past.

*Red lipstick, glamour and 'feeling good'*

Many of my conversations about gender focused on the ways in which women related to gender positions of the past, perhaps because it is so contentious in the context of present-day feminism. Furthermore, reflections on the use of masculinities of the past were often expressed mostly with reference to its interaction with femininities in relation to 'old school values' and good manners. Donna has been involved with people behind 'The Chap', a tongue-in-cheek movement of men and women dedicated to dressing up in tweeds and moustaches, with its own magazine dedicated to 'reinstate such outmoded but indispensable gestures as hat doffing, giving up one's seat to a lady and regularly using a trouser press.' (The Chap website). While 'The Chap' style is not necessarily one that suggests the 1950s specifically, Donna raised it in relation to gender roles on the vintage scene, suggesting that 'I'm thinking maybe men treat you in a different way as well when you dress like I do... When you go to jive dancing and things, particularly the older men […], they treat you a bit more like a lady and very much more elegant about things and asking you to dance.' (Donna i/v).

These dynamics could be seen as acting out an imagined return to the subordination of women through strict codes of behaviour dictated by gender that are passionately viewed by Hodgkinson: 'Men would go to the pub, to cricket and football matches, but women — never. You were not a person in your own right, but the doctor's wife, the butcher's wife, the farmer's wife or the baker's wife.' (Hodgkinson, 2012). I use these examples to illustrate that the

apparent resurrection of 1950s styles of dress and behaviour raise passionate questions about gender relations. I will specifically discuss masculine identity further below in my section on images of youth but for many female respondents masculinities served a *relative* sense to imagined Fifties female identity in terms of being admired or being asked to dance. Apparently revelling in what Laura Mulvey (1989) might call the male gaze, glamorous Fifties styles attract attention, as Verity boasts:

> I like that I get people come up and give me comments every single time I leave the house. That's always nice, you know, I always get a smile like, 'oh yeah, I like your hair', you know. Something like that, and that's always really nice. And great for my business, my lord, like I am literally my own walking publicity, like I've got so much work out of people just seeing my hair, you know. (Verity i/v)

Indeed, Fifties styles of dress and makeup are often described as 'more feminine' with nipped-in waists, A-line and pencil skirts, and high heels – as opposed to the development of relatively androgynous denim and sportswear in casual mainstream fashion. In some ways the Fifties revival is tapping into the high maintenance standards of glamour and appearance for women pushed by Hollywood: 'The variety of images of women in the movies narrowed as Hollywood focused on women as either sex objects or wives...Movie stars were the apotheosis of glamor and sexiness.' (Breines, 1992, 102). There is a focus on glamour and frequently high maintenance hair and make-up styles, leading to Verity running her own business in vintage styling.

However, the point I have visited elsewhere is that in the present this type of glamour is worn for the potential pleasure of looking different and of course, as Donna stated above, it is often ambiguous *who* is doing the looking and admiring. The pleasure of looking and being looked at is undoubtedly partly due to the fact that collective memory of the 1950s is associated with the

proliferation of glamorous colour images, in film and photography.[35] A rich library of mass media images from advertising, Hollywood films and magazines have been plundered in the present for fashion tips and ideas about a way of life in the past. There is a pleasure and inspiration in looking at images of the past, which seems exotic from a position of present hindsight and frequently use mythical icons (as explored in the quotation from Armstrong above in her reference to Elvis Presley and Princess Diana as mythical). Donna states, 'I read a lot of biographies actually from the 40s and 50s, like Diana Dors and Jayne Mansfield and Marilyn [Monroe] and Ava Gardner and David Niven, I love all of that. Cos obviously Hollywood then was an amazing place when you read about it.' (Donna i/v). While cinema is in one way a realm of the imagination, fantasy[36] and by extension, time travel, this experience is made in a reciprocal relationship with the spectator.[37] Verity explains how watching film musicals as a child led to her interest in ideals of glamour and the style:

> I think I was about 5 or 6 and I just got really into singing and dancing as every little girl does and just used to see all the old musicals and stuff like that and just really wanted life to be how the films were I suppose, sort of like this dream world that you know, I just adored. The glamour of it, the style of it, the love stories, the everything you know and the music and the dancing you know. [...] And as I got older just realised that sort of music was in the past and that kind of thing. And I really didn't think here was anyone that was into it now, so as I got older I got into different sorts of music like kind of punky stuff, that's what my mum was into when she

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[35] As Cook and Bernink (eds.) note, the production of American colour features ebbed and flowed throughout the 1950s, rising from 4% in 1940 to 51% in 1951. By 1958 this had fallen to 25% as a result of 'shrinking budgets and the emergence of the black-and-white television market' (1999, p.51). Buoyed up by increased television colour production in the 1960s, it wasn't until 1967 that the percentage of colour American feature films rose to 75% (1999, p.51).

[36] Psychoanalytical film criticism (such as Mulvey, 1989) coming out of the work of *Screen* magazine in the 1970s, frequently explored the link between cinema, fantasy and the unconscious, frequently with an aim of uncovering the 'ideological effects' and structures within cinema (Cook and Bernink, eds., 1999, p.342).

[37] Indeed, rather than viewing the film as a text with a clear decipherable 'effect' on the audience, Annette Kuhn has explored that film studies has come to view film as 'discourses caught up in and informing contexts, and vice versa' (2002, p.2) and she takes this further to account for the actual social reception and experience of films.

> was my age. And stuff like that. But always really loved the Fifties stuff, always used to dress, I call it 'Fifties inspired' (Verity i/v)

Even though her interest in music has fluctuated over time, Verity herself links her interest in the Fifties with the glamorous, dream-like world of watching old films as a child. Feeling glamorous is important to Verity, describing the jogging bottoms she wears to the gym: 'I feel so ugly... I just don't feel glamorous at all.' (Verity i/v).

Indeed, Donna's black eyeliner and red lipstick is a nod to beauty routines of the past, making reference to Hollywood legends and her own notions of past beauty standards:

> I don't feel right in myself when I wear something very plain, when I've not got my eye makeup on or I've not got my hair a certain way, don't know, maybe it's vanity. My Nan's like that too, like, my Nan doesn't ever like people coming round unless she's curled her hair, you know and she's 90, so... It's quite an old fashioned idea isn't it always looking your best when you leave the house. I've read a Joan Collins autobiography recently […]. Joan Collins would just never leave the house without having like full make-up and...I rarely go out without my lipstick, just don't feel right now, it's strange. (Donna i/v)

Donna here links her appearance to the idea of 'feeling right' in herself, a contentious issue considering Mulvey's and other feminist writers' analysis of the oppressive nature of commodified images of perfect femininity such as Naomi Wolf's in *The Beauty Myth*. Wolf argues that technologies for producing mass media and consumer-oriented imagery developed after the Industrial Revolution, when 'the cult of domesticity was first consolidated and the beauty index invented.' (1991, p.15). For Wolf, the beauty industry hinders women's individuality by presenting a vision of beauty that is 'by definition inert, timeless, and generic.' (p.17) and 'the myth' is a multi-pronged attack by patriarchal systems afraid of women's growing economic independence. Indeed, Romola

Garai, star of BBC Two's Fifties drama *The Hour* (discussed in the next chapter) commented on the 'Fifties revival':

> I think that's the problem with the fifties revival: If you can't be openly sexist, you can at least return to a time that was. Return to corsets, to the explosion of the cosmetics industry, to a really dark time for women in terms of the power dynamic at home. I don't think the women of that time would have hoped for their granddaughters to yearn to return to inches of makeup, to the obsession with appearances, and the narrow definition of what it was to be beautiful. (Vineyard, 2011)

From this point of view, a return to 'inches of makeup' and Wolf's 'ideals and stereotypes' (1991, p.15) such as those of Hollywood above, appear controlling and damaging to women. As I noted, Donna's quotation above illustrates how closely ideas of female appearance and beauty are linked to a woman's sense of self-esteem; having to look a certain way when leaving the house, for example.

So, taken at face value, femininity in the Fifties revival could be seen as a harnessing of those myths of the 1950s, perpetuated by cinema and the media, as having strict moral and gender codes of conduct, appearance and manners for men and women. However, what I suggest is that these expressions of using Fifties myths are actually used in a self-conscious, performative way in the service of the present. The effect of deploying contrasting myths of behaviour attributed to Fifties feminine identity through baking, figure-hugging outfits, or distinctive makeup, are not necessarily anti-progressive but used in the project of individual lifestyles and creating a unique identity. One of my questionnaire respondents, Mary, suggested 'I love the 1950s style, it's fun, bright, feminine and sometimes cheeky and is different to how most people dress these days.' (Mary q/r). While this statement attributes certain specific perceptions of fun, colour and femininity to the 1950s, the notion

of the era being ‘cheeky’ and ‘different’ illustrates that distance from the past and the new meanings that are made from Fifties styles in the present. The use of the contrasting, popular culture-influenced images is an act of bricolage which transforms their meaning and creates a disjuncture between the past and the present, raising questions about history and comparisons between then and now.

It can also be seen that the idea of Fifties beauty can provide a way to play with versions of femininity and appearance in the present. This is illustrated in the example of the revival of red lipstick and the mythical meanings it symbolises. Red lipstick is an example of the contradictions of popular memory, all at once calling up the arguably oppressive high maintenance standards of beauty for women as well as signifying an assertive glamour and power. I commented to Donna that the ‘old-fashioned’ styles are perhaps a bit more high maintenance, to which Donna remarked that it ‘doesn't have to take long. People probably spend longer doing other things, I don't know, spray tans or...whatever it is!’ (Donna i/v). She expresses that past styles are in a way another identity to try on, another variation of grooming and beauty consumption that women might engage in now. However, the use of red lipstick can be viewed a unique, powerful look when taken out of its original context, and potentially part of the undermining of myths that can happen when styles of the past are brought into the present. Donna’s red lipstick does not necessarily mean the same as it did to conventions of fashion in the 1950s – in her present context it represents something quite distinctive, daring, a ‘bold look’ (Donna i/v). Whereas previously Donna ‘felt quite different putting red lipstick on’ (Donna i/v), she also mentioned the trend for red lipstick appearing in beauty

magazines in recent years. These trends seem to be harnessing the 'power' of red lipstick as a strong look for women. In 1975, Angela Carter wrote on the revival of red lipstick as symbolic of unrestrained and unruly woman, her red lips representing 'a bloody gash, a visible wound. This mouth bleeds over everything, cups, ice-cream, table napkins, towels. […] We leave our bloody spoor behind us, to show we have been there.' (Carter, 1997, p.112).


Image 12: Boots No.7 advertisement (photograph by the author)

In the late-2000s, red lipstick has become associated with glamour, confidence and power. In 2011, the *Guardian*'s Sali Hughes called red lipstick 'elegant, flattering, timeless and lethally, uncompromisingly sexy', while in 2013 *Boots* ran a 'real women' advertising campaign for its No.7 makeup range with one of its models posed in red nail varnish and lipstick with a caption 'You will take these red lips seriously'.

Carol Dyhouse also quotes Angela Carter in order to suggest the historical associations of power and glamour in relation to red lipstick. She associates bold lipstick colours with the 'Modern girl' of the 1930s where 'Modernity, independence and lipstick continued to go together in the minds of many contemporaries' (2011, p.65). In 1952 Revlon launched the red shade *Fire and Ice*, still available today, featuring a lively advertising campaign with a model 'posing in an icy silver-sequinned dress, under a scarlet cape, alongside fifteen questions or challenges for the viewer':

> These ranged from the banal 'Have you ever danced with your shoes off?' or 'Do you blush when you find yourself flirting?' to the rather more interesting 'Do sables excite you, even on other women'?
> (Dyhouse, 2011, p.104)

Overall presenting a '"Fire and Ice" girl' as 'the most exciting woman in all the world!', the advertisement itself presented tensions between women as not only 'demure' and 'delightfully baffling' but 'tease', 'temptress' and 'dynamic'.
So while Naomi Wolf may have argued for make-up as a tool of patriarchy, in other ways make-up can and has been used as a challenge, albeit within the system of capitalism. Furthermore, wearing something out of context – as with the revival of red lipstick (which Dyhouse notes waned in popularity with the dark eyes and nude lips of the 1960s and 1970s) – can have a powerful impact. The co-opting of iconic past styles is not new, as Angela McRobbie notes, with 'beat girls and women' raiding the rag markets of the 1950s for 'fur coats, satin dresses and silk blouses of the 1930s and 1940s middle classes'. (1989, p.34).

Indeed, the performance of femininities of the past can provide a unique look, as well as a strong visual contrast in the present. I argue that nostalgic myths of Fifties femininities illustrate the past/present relation at the heart of popular representations of the past because they explore the contradictory

ways that myths can be used and challenged. In the tension between past and present they illustrate the complexities and potential contrasts of the past, rather than presenting a unified, one-dimensional version of a particular mythical construct. These re-imaginings of mythical Fifties femininities, rather than erasing the complexities of the past, can work through and actively contradict one another in the present. Part of this is through the activity of individuals in the (often slightly satirical) performance, consumption and embodiment of these gender myths, a theme which I continue in the next section.

*Burlesque, sex and taste*

The issue of 'performing' gender identities links up with elements of fantasy, play and choice. This section will examine the way myths of being 'sexy' in the Fifties intermingles with contrasting values of 'glamour' and 'innocence'. The revival of burlesque and vintage sexualities came up as an interest in questionnaire responses and interviews. While none of my interviewees mentioned they participated in burlesque in the sense of cabaret or performance, both Donna and Verity have done some vintage pin-up style modelling, which often shares a style in manner and costume with burlesque. The model Bettie Page, whose foray into the world of pinup work and burlesque was relatively short from 1953 to 1957, was revived as a popular cult icon through an appearance in comic books of the 1980s (Bettie Page website). Her style has certainly influenced the more 'vampish' glamour style of the rockabilly revival and the 'Bettie Page fringe' is an iconic style of belonging for many female Fifties enthusiasts. As Dave P observes, 'if they've got their hair done in a '50s bob or a Bettie Page or whatever...I think people realise then, you know, you live this life and you're not just, you know, dressing up or fancy dress'

(Dave P i/v). Bettie Page's photographs and films varied widely in style from under-the-counter bondage material to cheery all-American bikini shots to exotic dance to faintly ridiculous 'jungle style' images with her posing in trees and with big cats (Bettie Page website). Assisted by the icon of the reclaimed Bettie Page, myths about Fifties sexuality have become aligned with a culture of burlesque and pinups developing since the 1990s.

This is frequently associated with art, humour and performance rather than other forms of stripping or pornography. For example, the feminist-leaning blog Jezebel expressed the perceived position of the 'knowing observer' inherent in the burlesque revival, 'To us soigné sophisticates, since the 90's the burlesque revival movement has been synonymous with a particular sort of riot-grrl empowerment, a conscious cooption of old-fashioned sex appeal with a new approach to burlesque as a tongue-in-cheek art form that promotes body acceptance.' (Stein, 2009). In opposition to this, Laurie Penny reported from personal experience of burlesque performance that 'Burlesque serves up misogyny in a tasteful package of feathers [...]. The sexual tease is always a -substitute for real personal and political power' (Penny 2009). Indeed, Donna commented on her promotional work for vintage underwear manufacturer Ophelia Fancy:

> We do lots of promoting events, getting dressed up in their corsets and frilly knickers and gingham and sometimes we look 50s. [...] but yeah, you're thinking... 'is this feminism', do you know what I mean, like how much of it is liberating women and how much of it is pandering to what men want. But then you think well, I'm a woman and it's making me feel good so it's OK but... it's still making women feel like an object isn't it and that they have to have a certain amount... a certain beauty. It's a difficult one, I don't think I'll ever rectify that kind of thing in my mind actually. (Donna i/v)

Natasha Walter and Ariel Levy have both critiqued the notion of female empowerment through erotic and sexual performance. The subtitle of Walter's book is 'the return to sexism', clearly suggesting temporal boundaries of historical change – we are returning to something that we thought had gone. However, rather than view retro sexualities only in the context of an anti-feminist retrograde step, it is more useful to analyse them as evidence of the past-present relation which can also complicate contemporary feminisms.

Feona Attwood has also explored the taste distinctions in contemporary 'alternative pornography' via the website Suicide Girls, which often 'involves the recycling of the codes and conventions of retro and contemporary subculture imagery' (2007, p.448). Attwood suggests that representations such as Suicide Girls 'attempt to define themselves through a variety of oppositions to mainstream culture – and especially mainstream porn – as creative, vibrant, classy, intelligent, glamorous, erotic, radical' (p.449). Attwood suggests that retro sexuality is part of the broader 'sexualisation' of Western culture and as part of this, 'burlesque is undergoing a revival, producing new stars such as Dita Von Teese.' (Attwood, ed., 2009, pxv). While vintage styles of erotic performance have certainly helped to allow certain forms of sexual display to be embraced as 'empowering', Penny, Levy and Walter would have much to comment on the politics of this. Nonetheless, in many ways images of sexuality from the past are frequently used as a safe, alternative way of exploring sexualities and sexual display. This both functions as a means of representing taste distinctions as analysed by Attwood above, and also can be used as a form of subversion, as I explore in the next section.

Maria Elena Buszek has explored how feminists have been able to use the image of the pin-up and burlesque style because of its subversive history of gender play and performance (2006). According to Buszek, there is feminist potential within pinup representations from a tradition of burlesque which represent women with agency and awareness. From Buszek's analysis, there is a potential for gender play in the history of the pinup; from the cross-dressing of early theatrical performers in the 19th century such as Ida Isaacs Menken's 'cartes de visites' (p.45) to the glamorous sexual ambiguity of Marlene Dietrich's publicity shots (p.194). Buszek notably distinguishes between earlier, potentially feminist, representations of the pinup and a post-Second World War proliferation of a 'less aggressive, thoroughly nostalgic construction of the contemporary woman' (p.233), culminating in the subservient *Playboy* bunny, submissive to the 'male gaze' (p.237). However, she makes an exception for the already-mentioned Bettie Page who has arguably made the most popular stylistic impact in 1950s revivals since the late 1970s. According to Buszek, her 'brazen, over-the-top poses' and 'her ability to shift gears within a spectrum of extreme sexual roles' (p.247) meant that she challenged other more 'binary' representations of female sexuality. This potential led to her later becoming 'one of the most imitated models for feminist appropriations of the genre.' (ibid.). The key part of the effect of vintage styles of sexuality is the aspect of taking them out of their original context – myths of the 'innocent' past in comparison to the proliferation of sexual images and nudity in the 21st century certainly gives images of retro sexuality a fun, exotic and theatrical look.[38]

[38] While I do not necessarily follow Levy's 'raunch culture' thesis, it can be said that images of nudity, sexuality and pornography have become more widely accessible due to expanding communication technologies such as the internet. This has also allowed images to evolve from their original temporal context as they can be endlessly duplicated, imitated and amended.

Verity explains the dichotomy between retro versus more mainstream 'page 3' type representations of female erotic display from conversations with male friends:

> When they look at a picture in Zoo magazine or whatever those sort of magazines are, you know, and they see some sort of 'Page 3' girl or whatever they think 'mmm yeah' you know, 'I want to fuck that' really. But when they see, you know, a beautiful girl, you know, that's not completely naked [...], like they look really glamorous they think 'god she's beautiful!' [...]. When you display yourself as a finely dressed girl, you know, even if it's just in underwear but, you know, and I think definitely it's a way about posing as well you're making those beautiful shapes with your body, like the lines that a photographer's sort of looking for, you know, by bending the leg and stuff like that. (Verity i/v)

She perceives a kind of 'art' to pinup modelling, related to burlesque in terms of an effort and skill of using your body to make 'beautiful shapes'. While she enjoyed her experience of doing some pinup modelling, she still seems to view pinups in the context of female beauty for the male viewer. However, retro sexual display does not just implicate women as performers but also as consumers of the imagery – as with the adoption of Bettie Page haircuts. Donna explains her modelling for the brand Ophelia Fancy, in vintage-style corsets and frilly knickers: 'I think most of the women don't feel threatened by us because [...] people doing that kind of thing are often all different shapes and sizes as well as wearing something all lovely and frilly [...]. So they don't feel intimidated and they love what you're wearing.' (Donna i/v). She also describes how there are elements of humour that come into burlesque styles too and this adds to the sense that it is not daunting for women because 'there's something funny happening'. Vintage sexualities offer an alternative to the more overtly explicit styles of erotic entertainment such as full nudity or depictions of sex acts in hardcore pornography. Furthermore, undoubtedly a lot of burlesque's appeal

is down to theatre, aesthetics and taste in its over-exaggerated performance. Emma enjoys elements of this theatricality:

> There's something that's not so sexual about burlesque, I suppose it's a lot more innocent isn't it than what I imagine a lot of stripping is. [...] But yeah I like the whole image of it and the fact that if you go somewhere that sort of claims to be burlesque it's all done quite nicely, you get tablecloths and people have made an effort to dress up or whatever, you know, the whole image of it is quite nice I think. (Emma i/v)

There is a sense that burlesque is more 'tasteful' than other forms of erotic entertainment because, along with the pretty period details and associations with 'effort', it seems distanced from the perceived seediness of other forms of erotic entertainment such as the lap dance or strip club. As Attwood has analysed through her study of 'altporn' websites, there is a dichotomy in sexual representation which 'involves a recasting of sexual interest as literate and cool […]. This marks a departure in the presentation and marketing of porn which has generally been understood as a low, crude and 'dirty' form of cultural production.' (2007, p.445). Hence there are processes of distinction between various forms of erotic presentation, with 'retro' versions somehow appearing more 'classy' and tasteful for women. Indeed, burlesque is often framed as accessible to women, as with the Brighton-based Seven Veils Productions which runs a comedy, burlesque and club night as well as hen party pole dance classes and 'empowering' burlesque strip tease sessions 'designed to promote body confidence and to help you create a burlesque character' (Seven Veils Productions website).

I conceive of the Fifties revival as being part of the mainstream Western 'sexualisation' of culture explored by Attwood; it makes certain sexual imagery acceptable by resurrecting old images which play on myths of retro sexuality and give these myths new meanings in the present. For example, burlesque

performances and retro pin-ups are imagined as beautiful, tasteful and arty when compared to hard-core pornography today, and the consumption of these is seen as a discerning and 'knowing' choice. This is also evidence of the past-present relation of popular memory, the past is utilised in the service of imagination, fantasy and pleasure in the present. Linda Hutcheon has linked the role of 'knowingness' and irony to nostalgia's critical faculties, playing a key role in Boym's 'reflective nostalgia' (Hutcheon, 1998). Indeed, the role of irony in terms of the dynamics of 'kitsch' is something that I will explore further in Chapter 3, but for now I suggest that Hutcheon's argument is valid particularly to illustrate the past and present relation at play in terms of 'poking fun' at gender roles and sexual images of the past. Myths of Fifties sexuality are unsettled and questioned by the use of various contrasting myths together encapsulated in the images of Bettie Page whose photographs depict a multi-faceted image of Fifties sexuality as incorporating innocence, fetish, power and humour. The interaction between different contrasting myths can open up space to play with the boundaries of gender and reclaim sexual display as performance.

Retro sexuality seems to frequently use 'traditional' images of gender and sexuality as an ironic statement, by performing those representations in new contexts. This apparent clash between past and present can be seen as encouraging a view of gender and sexuality as a performance, rather than fixed and timeless. Indeed, the notion of gender identity and sexuality as a performance implicates the politics of camp. Camp frequently plays with the stuff of myth, in the form of performing stereotypes and clichés, often with an ironic and subversive slant. I acknowledge Moe Meyer's analysis of the specific

political and queer politics of camp, arising from gay culture but broadening into a formation of queer politics which goes beyond gay and lesbian identities and recognises queer as 'a radical challenge to the entire concept of an identity based upon sexual orientation or sexual desire […] in the deconstruction of the homo/hetero binary' (Meyer, ed., 1994, p.3). Indeed, Buszek's alignment of the feminist pinup with a burlesque tradition of theatrical performance and gender subversion can be aligned with Pamela Robertson's (1996) characterisation of 'feminist camp'. Rooting her analysis in burlesque and the performances of Mae West, Robertson explores how female artists have performed female sexuality in an over-exaggerated, flamboyant and self-conscious way similar to camp, and in this way have been allowed to explore and reclaim female aesthetic presentation. With the caveat that 'I want to avoid reifying pleasure as wholly resistant', she appropriates camp 'as a kind of parodic play between subject and object in which the female spectator laughs at and plays with her own image [...] without losing sight of the real power that image has over her.' (1996, p.17). The question of agency here is particularly apparent in comments from Donna and Emma on their choices and appearance in terms of gender. There is a notion of gender roles of the past as fantasy and play, as Donna states:

> You know, women still want to have their rights and be treated equally so...although there are, like, The Chap magazine that we spoke about I mean [...] that's got a whole element of behaving a certain way as a man and... but it's not all real is it, it's a bit of a rose- tinted glasses way at looking back at the past. (Donna i/v)

Here Donna recognises the 'rose tinted' image of the past blends with an awareness of the fact that women also 'want to have their rights'; there is an enjoyment in playing with gender styles of the past but they know 'it's not all real

is it'. Indeed, in some ways the Fifties revival idea of gender and sexualities into a kind of camp gender performance: the images are used in knowing contrast to the present, and there is pleasure for the individual in playing with and dressing up in the surface appearance of 'traditional' sexualities and genders.

This idea of the 'rose-tinted' past is one that comes up again and again in relation to the Fifties, as noted already in the efforts of Jessica Mann to counter the image of the Fifties as 'prettier and nicer' (2012, p.7). However, I have illustrated that many of the perceived practices of 1950s living, at least in terms of using symbols and objects which convey myths about female identities are not to do with any truth of women's experience in the 1950s, but instead offer conflicting meanings that service the present. Emma in particular discussed using identities from the Fifties in relation to perceptions of the 'oppressive' Fifties. She describes how her girlfriend has discovered more 'feminine' styles of clothing from the 1940s and 1950s which suit her shape and also how the mythical, iconic gender roles offered by the past offer stylistic references for having fun with identities within their relationship:

> Being a butch lesbian there is a bit of playing with that gender thing in a butch/femme relationship, you know, the kind of housewife thing that you sort of play and you subvert those sort of stereotypes and so maybe there's fun about that but not nostalgia to want to go and live in the Fifties. (Emma i/v)

By enacting easily recognisable appearances of 'masculine' and 'feminine' (Emma with her quiff, tank tops, shirts and wide leg jeans, and her girlfriend in dresses and 'feminine' high-waisted trousers and blouses) as a lesbian couple, these easily recognisable signifiers gain a new representational meaning. Perhaps the perceived 'oppressive' nature of strict gender roles falls away as

they are tried on and embodied by two women in a relationship. Furthermore, Emma describes the pleasures and contradictions between the fantasy and potential reality of the past:

> Obviously I don't have a particularly romantic view of what it would have been like to live in the Fifties as a lesbian, I mean it must have been awful, you know. And the only things that make me think 'oh I'd really like to go back' and be in the Gateways Club [...] in London, this lesbian club. It was sort of this underground club which particularly butch and femme women used to go there and some old queens used to go there as well and they used to get raided by the police all the time and they'd all have to swap couples dancing when the police came in and all try and dance with the man but often the man would have a wig and makeup on... it would all be very confusing and... But I kind of think oh I'd like to go and look at that, you know, go somewhere underground. (Emma i/v)

Emma is interested in this history and observes that particularly for butch women, life in the 1950s could be very difficult, 'it was either kind of change or be kept [by femme women] and you know, not be able to earn your own money and stuff and be in a very vulnerable position' (i/v Emma). Still, there is certainly a contradiction in the enjoyment of ironically revelling in the powerful association of the 1950s with oppression. Homosexuality was still illegal, despite recommendations by the Wolfenden report of 1957 (Hennessy, 2007, p.501). However, with the benefit of a safe temporal distance from that reality, and living in Brighton where gay culture is visible in local clubs and bars, the fantasy of peril and an underground, outsider gay culture has an appeal for Emma. In the disjuncture created by the contrasts and tensions revealed in Fifties sexualities and gender play – for example, the domestic imagery of the housewife combined with the frilly knickers and red lipstick of the pin-up; a lesbian couple dressing up in 'traditional' Fifties dress – there is a space for pleasure as well as to undermine these images as the impossible mythical

constructions that they are.

*Restorative nostalgia: 'Fifties' community, austerity and tradition*

I have explored above the ways in which a kind of reflective nostalgia, combined with a 'knowingness' in taking the past out of context, can be used to create a tension between myths and critique nostalgic images of the past. Many of the more nostalgic myths of the past expressed by my interviewees were also to do with the myth of the 1950s as having values based on the local and community cohesion. For example, Verity stated:

> I think society has got absolutely ridiculous nowadays and especially like with the youth of today which makes me sound so bloody old […]. Everyone used to know everyone and they'd all have local little knees-up parties and stuff like that and, you know, now no-one knows their neighbours, you know, no-one talks to each other really where they live. Most people are scared of everyone else, or scared of what's going to happen. (Verity i/v)

Verity takes pleasure in putting effort into her domestic life, calling up the 'domestic goddess' and extending this to participation in the community by making handmade cakes for her son's school events: 'All the people at school think I'm absolutely mental when I do the school run, I turn up in, you know big dresses and sun hats. But they all love it, you know, they think it's great and on fetes I take real homemade cakes in and you know, spend hours decorating them and things like that' (Verity i/v). Relating these values to the perceived values of the Fifties could be seen as classic 'restorative' nostalgia, an inaccurate and simplified version of a 'preferable' past which denies the 'specificity and diversity of the past.' (Chase and Shaw, 1989, p.10).

Indeed, the linking of the post-war era with community spirit has been reflected in the broader cultural mood illustrated, for example, in a 2009 episode of BBC Two's *Newsnight*. In a special programme themed around austerity, the

episode approached the financial crisis with certain mythical comparisons to the post-war era. It featured a discussion between presenter Kirsty Wark and three guests: historian David Kynaston, psychologist Felix Economakis, and property guru Kirstie Allsopp. In the discussion the panellists made various references to the post-war past as they discussed how post-Second World War austerity compared to the recession facing Britain in 2009, raising still more myths of the past in relation to the present. Economakis stated that, 'I think there was more of a community spirit, people mucking in together, all for the good of the nation, definitely. The aftermath of the war when everybody had much more an idea of solidarity than we do now.' Allsopp suggested that there could be such a thing as 'austerity chic' having appeared to have made an abrupt U-turn from her role as television presenter on the property buying show *Location, Location, Location* to advocate frugal second hand living on *Kirstie's Homemade Home*.[39] Referring to the Ministry of Information's *Make Do And Mend* campaign of the Second World War she asserted, 'We have to be *proud* of make do and mend…the concept that new is best has to be a thing of the past'.

Could it be said that this is all restorative nostalgia and a yearning to go back to a static past because the present is deficient? In a similar way to Verity, who uses myths of the 'knees-up' to express dissatisfaction with elements of her community today, Allen also seems to express dissatisfaction with the present:

[39] A strategic move perhaps, both catching the mood of the time and potentially to counter the view that estate agents and figures such as Allsopp were to blame for the financial crisis. In 2008 Allsopp was moved to write a piece defending herself again accusations that programmes such as *Location Location Location* had helped fuel the housing crash by 'puffing up the property market, forcing people into taking out massive mortgages or into negative equity…Blaming such shows and their presenters for the present uncertain state of the property market is akin to blaming TV chefs for the great bulge in obesity.' (Allsopp, 2008, p.24).

> Yeah it would be great if you could go back [...]. I think I would love it. You can't have all the stuff, the innocence of the age, that's all gone. I mean, Gordon Bennett, you didn't used to get people going around shooting each other over a mobile phone, you know. There was none of that back then, there was crime obviously but, and juvenile delinquency was supposedly at its worst and all the rest of it but it's got to be a damn sight better than it is now. Nowadays you can't even walk the streets safely half the time. (Allen i/v)

However, it is clear there is always a link between ideas of what British society was like then and now, and that these opinions and comparisons are able to be made because they are from a position of present hindsight. Geography potentially plays a part, in that Verity and Allen both live in busy urban areas of North London, Allen in Stoke Newington and Verity in Brondesbury. Allen works on the London Underground and explains how he got in trouble with his employer when he got involved in an arrest:

> A police officer was trying to arrest somebody at work and this geezer's mate decided to try and jump in so I jumped in on his mate. And I'm being told over the radio 'oh no get back get away get away' - no! [laughs] Because if you don't stand up to them, there's no point, may as well just roll over and die! But that's what it was like back then, people would stand up to other people, people had values, people cared about other people and nowadays they don't. (Allen i/v)

While it might seem that Allen is nostalgic for Britain in the 1950s, I explore further below how many contradictions are apparent where the idea of the 1950s becomes much more fluid and intangible than the notion of one static historical myth. In many ways these comparisons with the past fit with Allen and Verity's personalities in the present and are a means of expressing present values, rather than them particularly adhering to perceived past rules of behaviour. Allen stands up for people, Verity states that her interest in the Fifties has made her 'a better neighbour' as well as influencing the way she raises her son:

> Half the time I think kids are getting dragged up rather than you know, brought up, and I don't think children are taught manners like they should, especially like table manners and things like that you know. And silly things like, say back then a real treat was to go and have a picnic or go out for lunch somewhere, whereas now it's not, the kids don't want to sit down with their family and have lunch, that seems really boring, whereas my son sees it as a real treat. It's a really nice family sort of thing. (Verity i/v)

Again here Verity makes value judgements on her way of parenting through the lens of comparing it to perceived traditions of the Fifties. Her pride as a parent is reflected through myths of the 1950s as a time when people were more 'family-oriented'. Even if these ideas are based on imaginary myths, they are important ways that perceptions of the past are used to make sense of the present and justify choices, decisions and lifestyles. If this is nostalgia, it is nostalgia used for present purposes as a critique of the present, not just to restore the past as a kind of comfort blanket and a retreat from the present.

*Race and the Fifties revival*

In 2011, *Patak's* recalled the late 1950s to explore the heritage of the company with a young Kirit Pathak (the brand name was simplified for the English pronunciation) recalling how his Indian parents migrated to England and started their business from the home kitchen. Kirit's father, Lakshmishankar Pathak, arrived in Britain in 1956 on a bitter winter's day with nothing but 'Five pounds and a determination to build a life for his family in this freezing new home' (Patak's website). The family story suggests that his wife Shanta began making Indian snacks and sweets from the home kitchen and with all the family chipping in, the Patak's brand was born. With the motto 'why Britain loves curry', the TV advert conjures up a nostalgically British red-brick terrace with children playing in the street and Kirit's parents working in the family kitchen. 'You wouldn't believe how popular we became!' exclaims the young Kirit, as the

Pathak's white neighbours bustle in and join the family at a communal dinner table of Indian specialities. Part of the effect of the advertisement is to cement the image of the Patak's brand as a family business[40] – it was sold to retail group Associated British Foods in 2007 (Walsh, 2007) – and also plays with the myth of Britain in the 1950s and early 1960s as a place of community cohesion. It conjures up ideas about 'everyone knowing their neighbours' but forgets other negative perceptions of the Fifties in relation to community and race. Jessica Mann's assault on the rose-tinted image of the 1950s attests that 'Employers, landlords, bankers and anybody else who wanted to, could announce, 'no women' and landladies could screw signs to their doors saying 'Whites only' or 'No Jews, no Irish, no negroes, no pets.' (2012, p.22).

This advert clearly combined the historical moment of late 1950s immigration with myths of post-Second World War community and urban living, manipulating this to align the nation's love of curry with the present-day dream of multicultural Britain. This could be seen as a kind of 'restorative nostalgia' critique by Boym as reflecting on the past through 'rose tinted glasses' without any kind of reflection or critique. Indeed, historical accounts of the 1950s have explored immigration and the various contemporary responses to it, such as Hennessy's account of how tensions came to a head in some pockets of the country: 'What was new in the late 1950s, and genuinely a shock, was the first serious racial violence experienced within the United Kingdom in Nottingham

[40] Michael Rowlinson has conceptualised corporate representations of the past through 'Organizational Memory', most notably in a paper on how Cadbury has deployed its own history and heritage as a marketing tool as well as a defence against its takeover by *Kraft* in January 2012 (Rowlinson, 2012).

and Notting Hill, West London, in August – September 1958' (2007, p.496).[41] Indeed, this contrasts with certain myths I explored above of the Fifties of community, 'looking out for one another' and so on.

Conversations around the Fifties revival frequently raised the issues of race and communities, both in terms of reflections on community relations in the 1950s as well as politics on the Fifties revival scene today. There was frequently a blending of perceptions of race relations of the past and relating this to the Fifties revival. Ralph W discusses how 'old school values' of the rockabilly scene itself is part of what attracted him to it. He suggests that 'people tend to be quite polite, you're very much sort of like holding doors open for ladies and stuff like that [...]. Which is good, you know. Normally most people know each other on the circuit so there's rarely any trouble and if there is any trouble then people tend to find out who started the trouble and they're quite often banned from the gigs' (Ralph W i/v). The idea of racial integration is aligned with a sense of the Fifties as being characterised by new ideas and hopes for the future. Ralph W suggested that the Fifties represented progress: 'I think most people think of the Fifties as maybe a better time when things were changing for the better' (Ralph W i/v), and this included the ways in which popular culture could potentially bring black culture to the fore. As much of the contemporary subcultural interest lies in music, the perspective of race in the Fifties was viewed positively in relation to the individual black artists who were able to push through on the rock 'n' roll scene:

> I believe that the music helped pull people together really so I kind of see the positive side of it. 'Cause you've only got to look at some of

[41] Indeed, race relations were a contentious issue in Britain during the 1950s and early 1960s, as explored by in the account of immigration, racism and fascism in Britain by Paul Foot (1965) and in the broad histories by Hennessy (2006) and Kynaston (2009).

> the people that were big stars in the early 50s, for example, Little Richard. If a gay black man can make it in '53 then anyone can can't they? (Ralph W i/v)

Again, myths of the Fifties are related through iconic figures and by focusing on individual, unique stars who represented a challenge to the status quo, the 1950s can be reclaimed from being an era of conformity and racial prejudice to potentially a site of tension and change. However, the 'restorative' nature of nostalgia is also indicated here as Ralph W broadens the Fifties' progressive spin by attributing Little Richard's breakthrough as 1953 when his first big hit was in the later 1950s with *Tutti Frutti* reaching number 17 in the pop charts in 1956 in the USA (Friedlander, 1996, p.38). The reception of Little Richard's first UK release *Rip It Up/Ready Teddy* was also in 1956 and the racial tensions at the time are illustrated by Pete Frame's description of how 'Back then, the editor of one national newspaper thought it perfectly acceptable to describe him as "an animated golliwog"' (Frame, 2007, p.204).

Allen similarly states that he views rock n' roll and rockabilly as blazing a trail for potential integration in America:

> People like Elvis Presley who I'm not a big fan of, and all the early rockabillies were integrating with the blacks, with their music. Their music was basically black rhythm and blues music taken a next step forward and suddenly, with Elvis etc, popularised. So they were integrating. The rockabillies were integrating, just the rest of America wasn't! (Allen i/v)

In addition, Dave F's own account seems to want to resolve the reputation of some teddy boys. Indeed, some of his relatives appeared in Karel Reisz's *We Are The Lambeth Boys* (1959), a film which focused on the lives of working-class young people in South London at work, home and leisure. According to a synopsis by the British Film Institute, the film 'attempted to deliver a positive

portrait of the lives of ordinary teenagers, far from the usual violent 'Teddy Boy' stereotype.' (BFI Screenonline website). Dave F states:

> They would save up three, four, five, six months just to get a suit and it would be near enough saving up all their money. And that's I think, that goes back to a lot of the image of teddy boys standing around on street corners. And it weren't because they wanted to be violent or to mug people or anything like that. They spent a lot of time standing around on street corners because they weren't down the pub getting drunk every five minutes; they were either saving near enough all their wages to buy their box suit, or to buy a record when it was coming out. (Dave F i/v)

Nonetheless, he makes reference to the teddy boys' involvement in the late 1950s race riots as he reflects on the problems of the era, 'there was some of them that got in with the wrong groups of people, there was a lot of prejudice about' (Dave F i/v).

Certainly, there are tensions for the present inherent in utilising images and myths of the 1950s. In reflecting on the present scene, Dave F relates how the racism is a minority and people are welcoming:

> Even back in the 80s a friend of ours, Black Bill, massive great black guy, he was one of the first black teddy boys. [...] People became more open minded, as the years went on. Teddy boys were never something that were really racial, there was a small group that got involved with the wrong type of people [...] got a really bad press for it. But don't get me wrong they weren't angels if you see the follow up to [*We Are*] *The Lambeth Boys*. (Dave F i/v)

Indeed, David Fowler comments that the 'follow up' referred to 1985's *The Lambeth Boys*, which revisited some of the people featured in the first film, openly reveals 'how racist they had become' (2008, p.119). Emma also illustrates politics of class and race that emerge in different aspects of the Fifties revival, as she distances herself from what she views as bigoted elements of the culture. As she relates her own experience on the scene, she differentiates between the Rhythm Riot ('a lot more about the dancing and the clothes I

guess') and Rockabilly Rave ('pure rockabilly...a bit more of a drinking fest') weekenders. She has experienced 'unreconstructed male rubbish that there sometimes is at those things, a lot of sexism and, elements of racism, and there was a lot of homophobia, particularly at the rockabilly one.' (Emma i/v). She attributes these aspects of Fifties nostalgia to taste and class:

> I think the sort of traditional, rock n' roll, rockabilly, seems to appeal [...], it can attract, it's a very working class thing and you get a lot of rock 'n' roll bands who play in say, the working men's clubs. [...] The old teddy boys were not known for their, you know, being open to other people [...], you get these old blokes who were there the first time round and they're still not pleasant! (Emma i/v)

The potential for homophobia and racism related to 'old school values' of the Fifties is something referred to here by Emma, though it is largely not recognised by other interviewees. As I explored above, other interviewees have perhaps tried to heal the potential hurts of past discrimination with a view that reclaims the Fifties as a time of change, integration between races, and the roots of a more 'permissive' society. It could also be that more unpalatable issues of the past are 'silenced' because they are too difficult to resolve in the present. Alongside what is 'remembered', another key concern of memory studies is what is left unsaid or 'forgotten' – frequently traumatic, complex or unpleasant aspects of the past.[42] As Luisa Passerini states, 'Something may be unsaid because its memory has been actually repressed – by trauma, contrast with the present, conflicts of individual and collective nature – or because the conditions for its expression no longer (or do not yet) exist.' (2003, p238). In any case, I take Emma's opinion as an illustration of the way certain tensions and myths of the 1950s are viewed and experienced within Fifties revival

[42] Broader perspectives on forgetting are provided by David Gross (2000) who focuses his analysis of memory in late modernity on the specific dynamic between remembering and forgetting, and the meanings and uses of either position.

culture. As she discusses the 'unreconstructed' males she is expressing dissatisfaction with the idea that the 1950s necessarily should be associated perhaps with 'traditional Britain' and ideas about the nation. The contradictions of elements of the Fifties revival can lead to reflection and discussion about what the era of the 1950s should stand for, if anything. While Emma has a pre-gay liberation fantasy about underground clubs in the 1950s, she protests about homophobia and racism on the 1950s scene today. Perhaps this relates to Boym's conception of 'restorative' and 'reflective' nostalgia. A nostalgia which looks at the myth of Fifties society as heterosexual, white and British can be used against the present as a yearning for a 'restoration' of that society against our multicultural present. However, those on the Fifties revival scene illustrate an awareness of racial and social tensions during the 1950s themselves and often relate those to the current revival scene. Rather than accepting myths of Fifties community as some kind of authentic truth or in completely idealistic terms, there is frequently a reflexiveness about this which illustrates myths of the Fifties as a site of struggle and debate.

*Myth and Fifties America*

These final sections consider the ways in which myths of youth and perceptions of America are a key part of the Fifties revival. Allen's quotation suggesting 'the rockabillies were integrating' with their appreciation for Elvis and rhythm and blues music makes reference to how black music in Fifties America had the possibility to bring change to society. However, put another way, white performers' covers of songs originally by black artists could be seen as painting over the cracks; instead of dealing with issues of racism it made black songs acceptable for white society. As Kevin Chappell lamented in *Ebony* magazine:

> Lost is the reality that rock 'n' roll was actually born out of the belly of black blues music and raised by Black artists in the 1950s in smoke-filled clubs [...]. Only years later, when White teenagers began openly digging the electric guitars and the pounding drum beats that Black artists were playing – a sound their parents had disparagingly labeled 'race' and 'rhythm and blues' music – did White disc jockey Alan Freed re-name it 'rock 'n' roll,' and White artists entered the lucrative field without stigma. (1997, p.52)

It is perhaps harsh to suggest that black artists have been forgotten; as I've noted above many of my interviewees cite black music specifically as the origins of rockabilly and rock 'n' roll, while a recent album release *The First Rock And Roll Record* gained rave reviews and featured many original black artist recordings (Petridis, 2011).[43] Nonetheless, these examples illustrate how myths of Fifties America and race can intersect, not necessarily always telling the same story but illustrating history as a site of struggle and imagination. Chappell's quotation above also implicates another mythical Fifties figure, 'the (white) teenager'. What this final section will tackle is the way generations are implicated in mythical memory of the 1950s with a tension between the apparent 'granny clothes' of the vintage scene which in fact frequently seems to be mimicking particular representations of Fifties youth. Influential in what is remembered or forgotten about the 1950s are representations and myths of America which strongly become associated with the idea of 'the Fifties', often stemming from the myth-making power of American cinema, photography and advertising.

Allen in some ways revealed a strong optimism in the idea of the Fifties, and I have discussed above how he compares the past with his strong feelings

[43] For example, Nelson George (1988) has critiqued the history of rhythm and blues from the perspective that the genre has been compromised by its assimilation by white capitalist America, whereas Brian Ward (1998) has explored rhythm and blues alongside the history of black integration, with the view that it both challenged and affirmed the values of mainstream white America.

about Britain today. Out of all my interviewees he particularly conveyed the role of America in the Fifties revival and the way that it relates to a kind of mythical America which is used in the service of the present. The way that he accounts for this however, reveals a clash between potentially an idea of 'Fifties Britain' and 'Fifties America'. Referring again to myths of community spirit and also referencing the much mythologised Second World War[44] he states that:

> Whether it be Britain or America things were better back then. Values. People had more manners. People had more respect for each other. Even in Britain, they go on about the Blitz and all that lot, leading into the 50s and there was a lot of community spirit, and there was in America as well. (Allen i/v)

However, Allen elsewhere denounces Britain in preference for America, stating that everything he associates with the Fifties is American:

> Clothes, the cars. Again, America. Not Britain. Britain was a depressive place. [...] The cars were quality, the clothes were quality, the music was quality. They're the main icons. [...]. The films of those days were absolutely dire, but the pictures of them are fantastic! The actual artwork of the advertising, fantastic. Birds with heaving bosoms and long legs and great cars! The film, if you literally watched the film, is a load of crap! But [the poster] that's iconic. (Allen i/v)

Again he talks about the vitality and potential of Fifties America, conjuring up myths of the 'American dream':

> Talk about PMA positive mental attitude that was America at that time. Everything was just amazing. The atomic family, 2.2 kids, you know, it's where it came from. Everything was going so well for them... [...] I would have loved to have lived back in those days. [...] In 1954 I would have loved to have been 18, you know, in America, not here! Here I'd probably commit suicide but over there, what a way to live! (Allen i/v)

These statements illustrate that myths of America are used reflectively to consider different versions of the 1950s – the British 1950s as dull, America as youthful, exciting.

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[44] There is much recent research which questions and unpicks popular perceptions of the Second World War, for example Calder (1992), Noakes (1997), Rose (2004) and Connelly (2004.).

America has arguably influenced Fifties myths related to youth, accompanied by the association of America in the 1950s with new technologies, glamour and mass media. Part of this is the iconic mythical nature of America's famous people, objects and innovations. As Susan Marling states, 'our love affair with '50s America is influenced more by popular film and TV images like *Grease* and *Happy Days* than by the reality.' (1993, p.9). Her observations on American-influenced culture feature many myth-making icons of consumption that are associated with the Fifties: the shopping mall, Elvis, and McDonald's. Many researchers have considered how American myths have been conveyed particularly through the mediums of Hollywood cinema and photography. Paula Marantz Cohen has suggested that America's myth of itself in the 19th century was defined by its status as a new country with no past to hinder it in finding new ideals and ways of expression (2001, p.22). These ideas were mythologised in American Literature by figures such as Ralph Waldo Emerson who pushed forward ideas about America related to nature, dynamism and freedom (p.24). For Cohen, silent film was the first 'mass medium to take a narrative form', allowing 'a heroic, optimistic ideal about America to extend beyond its more elitist, theoretical origins as articulated on paper by the nation's Founding Fathers.' (p.16). Myths about America can also be tied up with notions of the American Dream, coined in 1934 by historian Truslow Adams and signifying America as place of possibility, success and opportunity (Guimond, 1991, p.14).

While I do not have space to go into the critiques of the American dream here, it is clear that a globalised American popular culture has heavily influenced perceptions of the 1950s. Peter Biskind has explored the influence

of popular culture in the form of Hollywood films from the 1950s in such a way as to contribute to the mythology of the era, defining it as 'an era of conflict and contradiction, an era in which a complex set of ideologies contended for public allegiance.' (2001, p.4). However, he asserts that the 'conventional' image of America in the 1950s is frequently of an era of conformity and consensus which is tellingly influenced by subsequent media revisions:

> For the majority of Americans, influenced by movies such as *Grease* and *American Graffiti* (sixties going on fifties) or television shows like *Happy Days*, the decade is suffused with nostalgia yearning for a simpler, happier time when cars had fins, gas was almost free, women were home and men were on the range. (ibid.)

James Guimond has argued that photography similarly has enabled mythical ideas about the 'American Dream' to be transported abroad in the photo publication *Life* which, like *Picture Post* in its short-lived but prolific run, has been responsible for many iconic documentary photographs. Guimond observes how photography can also create an intimacy with a time and space we have never lived through or experienced: 'documentary images extend our sense of community with other places and persons and includes them in our consciousness and our concerns.' (1991, p.17). As such, photography has enabled us to have a vivid, immediate experience and apparent closeness with the past. According to Guimond, the photo essays in photo magazines *Life* and *Look* frequently focused on American everyday life – 'the American economy, the American woman, leisure in America' (p.152), and many of the journalistic, documentary portrayals were utilised by the United States Information Agency (USIA) that promoted America abroad during the 1950s. However, Guimond notes, 'The American way of life pictures and photoessays made for *Life*, *Look* and the USIA in the 1940s and the 1950s, however, are notable for their

homogeneity: virtually everyone in them is white, middle class, and a member of a small nuclear family.' (p.170-1). I use these examples to illustrate that the American myths of prosperity, technology and success can be frequently read through the representing practices of America in the 1950s.

*'Youth', affluence and the Fifties revival*

The Fifties as young, white, affluent and American has been mythologised in some ways through the myth of the 1950s as the 'birth of the teenager'. This frequently goes hand in hand with other perceived advances (frequently from America) in technology, popular culture and society. This conflicts with the myths of the Fifties as defined by austerity, tradition and the home-made explored above. The Channel 4 series broadcast in 2012, *The House the 50s Built*, focused on technologies emerging during the 1950s that 'took drab, black and white post-war Britain and launched it, under its new young Queen Elizabeth 2nd, into a Technicolor-drenched world of the future.' (Channel 4 website). While the programme paid attention to the emerging 'new' technologies of the 1950s partly because its focus was on material culture from a science standpoint, the oversaturation of the new and colourful made the '1950s house' resemble something out of a Hollywood film or an advertisement from the glossy pages of a 1950s *Life* magazine. The episode on the bedroom focused on how the social recognition of the 'teenager' was born through technological development such as hairspray which allowed 'massive quiffs', electric guitars imported from America, and portable music players. According to the programme, 'By the end of the decade the bedroom was a place where kids could celebrate their individuality and a culture completely separate from their parents' could develop.' (ibid.).

Whether or not most children actually did have their own bedrooms in the 1950s, it is clear that the perception of a distinct developing 'teenage' culture is often attributed to 'the Fifties'. Bill Osgerby (1998) and Adrian Horn (2009) have countered the notion that the teenager was 'invented in the 1950s'. Osgerby has explored the longer trajectory of distinct 'youth cultures', with a more nuanced emphasis on continuity rather than sudden change. He observes emerging youth leisure markets since the middle of the 19th century and also cites the 1930s as a time when a particularly American-inflected youth culture began emerging in music and dance halls (1998, p.9). Rather than the notion that the teenager was 'born' in the 1950s, he argues that there was an intensification of the already growing 'visibility' of youth before the Second World War, due to various social factors such as the deskilling of labour and how this opened up earning opportunities for the young (p.24).

Richard Hoggart's own mythologising of British working-class culture was pitted against his famous laments against American culture 'coming over' in the 1950s, the milk bars with their jukeboxes and boys 'with drape-suits, picture ties, and an American slouch.' (Hoggart, 1957, p.248). Here there is a sense of generational conflict in Hoggart's dismay and disappointment at the loss of a more 'authentic' British working-class culture to coin-operated, homogenous American mass-culture. Another way of reading this is that Hoggart uses his own myths of working-class culture as a totem to challenge the stultifying effects of mass-produced popular culture, with the juke box representing a mechanised, homogenous kind of entertainment carefully tuned to appeal to its demographic and encourage 'copper after copper' to be deposited (ibid.). Indeed, as Osgerby observes, youth is more than just a concept of itself, but 'an

ideological axis around which cohered debates about [...] more fundamental shifts in social and cultural relations' (1998, p.28). Framing youth as a distinct group became a way of speaking about other anxieties and concerns. Dick Hebdige, writing in the late 1980s, suggested that the American influence on youth cultures offered a multitude, rather than narrow, range of options:

> the sheer plethora of youth cultural options currently available (e.g., the rockabillies, heavy metal enthusiasts, ted revivalists, etc.) most of which are refracted however indirectly through "mythical America" seems to suggest that the early fears about the homogenising influence of American culture were unfounded. (Hebdige, 1988, p.74).

He went on to suggest that America 'offers a rich iconography, a set of symbols, objects and artefacts which can be assembled and re-assembled by different groups in a literally limitless number of combinations' (ibid.) and could be used out of context as an alternative culture. Indeed, Adrian Horn has gone further back to explore the history of American styles on post-war youth cultures, finding that they were frequently adapted to the local and regional, as well as offering a means of creativity to make something new. In undertaking his research he found 'that the influences that *were* imported had been mediated through British social, economic and cultural conditions to create style fusions that were distinctive and particular to Britain at that time' (Horn, 2009, p.4). While Horn provides evidence which 'contests the notion that teenagers were part of an American cultural influence' (p.90), the myth of the teenager is one that still remains powerful since the 1950s.

When revisiting these commentators in the light of the Fifties revival, it is possible to see that while the myth of Fifties youth seems inseparable from those of American culture, the nuances of popular memory and nostalgia allow for these myths to be questioned and undermined in a present day context. For

example, the ‘subcultural’ elements of the Fifties revival create a tension between the apparent ‘innocence’ of the Fifties and the rebellious nature of rock ‘n’ roll, as well as disjuncture between the imagined ‘attitude’ of youth and the ‘granny clothes’ of age. As subcultural groups such as rockabilly got into the Fifties primarily through American music, the reissue of rockabilly records in the 1970s meant that their ‘looking back’ brought together the 1950s as well as American culture. These popular culture artefacts allowed a style built around an imaginary America, mostly for people too young to actually remember the 1950s themselves. There are distinctions that come up within this, for example, Allen referred to two types of female style, experienced from his business selling vintage clothing – the ‘little women [...], the poodle skirt brigade’ and the ‘sexy wiggle dress Hawaiian style, which is very femme fatale type’ (Allen i/v). Both are arguably influenced by American style, but harnessing contrasting myths within the clothing style.

Elizabeth Guffey has linked the appeal of Fifties America as related to the context of its revival, suggesting that images of youth and optimism from the post-war years got an ironic rework in the context of the frustration of this optimism since. Guffey argues that the Fifties revival of the 1970s translated ‘Ted rebelliousness into Howdy Doody innocence’ (2006, p.105), for instance in the cinematic representations such as *American Graffiti* and *Grease*. She views the revival style initiated by these popular culture products as less than radical and more a comfort blanket for bleak economic times (p.111). She suggests that the relationship between past and present was less easy in the 1980s, when ‘technological hopes and fears of the American post-war years’ (p.132) and Fifties visions of the future found their ironic expression in pop and

punk. The role of Fifties style in alternative bands such as The Smiths and The Clash blended Fifties/Sixties references (in both Morrissey's and Joe Strummer's hairstyles, in lyrics, and on their record covers[45]) with a music style for the 1980s. Johnny Marr, guitarist with The Smiths recently suggested 'I was trying to draw on American music in a way that had been forgotten […] "Nowhere Fast" has that rockabilly rhythm and "Shakespeare's Sister" was written entirely from that rhythm; some idea of a fucked-up Johnny Cash on drugs. It sounds half like that.' (Rachel, 2013, p.18). Furthermore, Allen makes fun of the 'poodle skirt brigade […] with their big shiny dresses and loads of petticoats with poodles on them and all the rest of it' while stating 'we don't wear British – teddy boy clothes' (Allen i/v). Hence there are multiple tensions between the veneration of the rebellious Fifties American teenager on the one hand, and the popularisation of the recycled *Grease*-style 'fancy dress'. This is both a clash between being 'in the know' and some kind of imitator, as well as a clash between innocence versus edginess – a tension that is always present in the Fifties revival, and part of this comes from its subcultural roots.

In the use of myths of youth there are similar elements of choice and fantasy at play here which I illustrated above in the retro gender play and performances of Emma, Verity and Donna. Particularly for my male interviewees, America becomes tied up with an idea of 1950s masculinity as young and rebellious. One of the symbols of 1950s style is the 'quiff', 'pompadour' or 'duck's arse' hairstyles for men, which Dave P attributes just as much of an iconic badge of belonging to the 1950s revival culture as the Bettie

[45] See Emma's reference to an image of a *Coronation Street* actress Pat Phoenix on The Smiths' record sleeves (in this case *Shakespeare's Sister*). The Clash's *London Calling* album cover similarly references the 1950s/1960s parodying Elvis Presley's debut album.

Page fringe for women. Horn explores the rebellious nature of teddy boy haircuts from the 1950s, along with other variations that were based on growing hair longer over the back of the head and the top of the brow which could be said to be influenced as much by foppish Edwardians as American film stars (2009, pp.124-5). Either way, they presented a visual challenge to the 'short back and sides of National Service' (Fyvel qtd. in Horn, 2009, p.125). However, the perils of mimicking young men in the 1950s can pose some problems for the middle-aged man, as Dave P relates:

> The only thing is getting older is losing your hair [...]. Because I think that is the thing that makes you stand out, you know. You can wear whatever clothes you like but if you've had your hair done in a pompadour and a duck tail, you're nailing your colours to the mast and you're saying this is what I am. And when you lose the ability to do that then people just think, oh he's just dressing retro, I guess. (Dave P i/v)

Ralph S similarly emphasised the importance of the quiff as a symbol, 'I think most blokes even if their hair is virtually falling out they still try and have a quiff even if they can't!' (Ralph S i/v). On a similarly youthful theme, Allen suggests that the rockabilly style is influenced by '50s films like the B-movies and all that lot, or the hot rod movies or the, what were called juvenile delinquent, JD movies' (Allen i/v). As old films and other media from the 1950s began to be rediscovered in the 1970s and gain a cult following, in a similar way to Guimond's suggestion about photography, they enabled an intimacy with another time and place. Despite also being middle aged, for Allen, the world of teen and B-movies from America has a mythology he approves of which is reclaimed for the present: 'It just shows us what we perceive it as if it was, it probably wasn't quite that – obviously the parents and the austere way that they tried to control their children. But the children rebelled and they said you know, rock 'n' roll's the devil's music, well, thank god for that!' (Allen i/v). Films like

*Rebel Without A Cause* (1955) could later be used to harness the rebellious myth of the American teenager as a subcultural style for the present. Allen also related these myths to his own life story as he states that he first got into rockabilly music and style at age 14. He left the style when he got married, but 10 years later, and splitting up with his then wife, he rekindled his passion for the 1950s in the late 1990s/early 2000s:

> The average age of men on the rockabilly scene was 38 and divorced. Going through our second childhood. That's how this rockabilly scene has become massive because we've all got back into it, all of us that got married and were out of it and get divorced, and we don't want to relive our youth, just thinking well sod it, I've been tied down for so many years I want to go back to what I love. (Allen i/v)

For Allen, America represents very much opportunity and potential in the present, as when I interviewed him he also revealed he and his wife were saving up to emigrate and join his brother to live in the USA permanently.

*Conclusion*

In this chapter I have explored the ways the 1950s are often carried through certain objects and symbols as shared, easily recognisable, 'myths' and perceptions of the Fifties. I have linked myth and nostalgia because they both share qualities of an engagement in the past as a realm of fantasy and imagination, which I argue can be deployed and enjoyed in terms of a reflexive personal choice rather than some kind of passive consumption. While myths are clearly a method of easily packaging the past in visual terms in popular culture, I have illustrated how nostalgic myths are frequently a site of play and imagination. I have used myth to interrogate the division of nostalgia into 'reflective' and 'restorative', arguing that even apparently 'restorative' myths can be used in ways which challenge the idea of a simplistic or conservative return to the past.

I have identified themes from my interviews and from Fifties revival culture and rhetoric which have come to form a 'Fifties mystique'. One of the most powerful (and controversial) ways in which the Fifties have been embodied is through the choice of style which plays on the perceived 'myths' of clear gender boundaries between masculinity and femininity. Furthermore, images of retro sexuality have also attributed mixed myths to the Fifties as a time of glamour rather than objectification, and a more innocent time (but still 'cheeky') before the production of explicit pornography. I argue that when various contrasting myths are brought together they create a challenge to a simple idea of history in the present because they create a picture of contradiction as well as employing a kind of ironic representation when viewed with present hindsight. An example of this could be Emma using the so-called 'clear' boundaries of Fifties masculinity and femininity to dress up with her girlfriend, performing at the same time as undermining those very clear surface appearances. The Fifties revival may sometimes be framed as going back to the past, but in stylistic references from the rockabilly scene it becomes barely recognisable to anyone that lived through the era, despite those people who come up to Verity and say 'you look like my nan'.

However, there is also the sense of optimism in the Fifties, that it was somehow a mythical golden age of community and progress, with music and popular culture aiding racial integration. Myths of Fifties youth and America are also embraced for their sense of fun and the possibility of national confidence. There is a visible impossibility in the activities of middle-aged men harnessing the style and attitude of the eternal teenager, but this myth is latched onto to give vigour to the present as in Allen's rekindling of his previous interest in

rockabilly later in life. Furthermore, there is a fantasy about the dichotomy of post-war austerity and affluence which provides a mythical energy worth tapping into:

> I think the 50s was a time to celebrate. You know, after all the hardships of like the 30s and the 40s the 50s was the time where you could fill your house with all these beauties, afford to buy the newest things coming out, [...] it was all about money really if you think about it. It's the first time that people really had money and [...] everyone used to go out drinking and partying cos it's the first time they could really. (Verity i/v)

While Verity might wear old clothes, conjuring up ideas about grandparents and traditions, her social behaviour at rockabilly weekenders might contradict that as she describes how everyone gets 'pissed as farts' at the chalet parties. I have shown that when the past becomes myth, it utilises static, unchanging, taken-for-granted objects. However, when these myths are deployed as style or consumption in the present, competing myths collide and contrast, bringing to the fore the idea of the past as a site of struggle and debate. It also illustrates myth as a way of making meaning in the present, justifying current lifestyle choices, and making the past relevant for today.

## Chapter Three:
## Authenticity, 'Illustrated History' and Perceptions of the Fifties

My first two chapters have engaged with the dynamic between the past and present in the re-imagining of the Fifties – first in the concept of re-enactment, then through myths of the Fifties as expressed through these objects and symbols of re-enactment. This has been particularly conveyed through concepts of 'authenticity' – legitimacy through 'truth' whether historical, cultural or to the self. This has particularly been expressed in my conversations with those involved in a stylistic and cultural Fifties revival. The engagement with Fifties aesthetics through material and popular culture is expressed through a framework of taste and choice which is often articulated through dialogues about authenticity. This is also a way in which individuals move back and forth between belonging to a collective 'scene' identity and private lifestyle. Fifties enthusiasts that I spoke to frequently justified their style choices through something feeling 'right' or legitimate for the individual: a personal sense of the past, but it also frequently fitted with the wider group. This chapter will explore authenticity as a subjective concept and explore the implications of authenticity for a collective sense of the past.

In history, film and cultural studies, the politics of representing the past has frequently been argued in terms of accuracy or, conversely, a falsification of history. Authenticity, accuracy and truth has frequently figured as a conceptual axis for debating historical, cinematic, or (sub)cultural authenticity. This is also related to discussions in my last chapter which explored myth as a pejorative term, associated with potentially 'unreflective' versions of nostalgia and a broad-brushed or manipulated history. With these arguments in mind, it is now necessary to embark on a more focussed analysis of the operations of

authenticity when it comes to the Fifties. As in the previous chapter, I will examine how the workings of authenticity within representations of the Fifties function as a way of understanding the past and present relationship in popular perceptions of the past.

Authenticity can be approached as a hinge on which the politics of the past operate in popular memory across the twin landscapes of the private and the public; personal and collective memory. The public and private senses of the past feed into one another and contradict a straightforward notion of an authentic past. In the last chapter I referred to Nick Thomas' call for further endeavours to understand and make sense of the complexities of the post-war period in all its forms and contradictory evidence (2008). However, public representations of the past or 'heritage', such as museums and other cultural commemorations, frequently engage the public with popular cultural displays that appeal to cliché, stereotypes and nostalgia. The next chapter will explore the role of authenticity in heritage culture and 'the Fifties', while this chapter will focus on the significance of authenticity as a discursive tool in terms of a general 'sense' of the Fifties in subcultural practices, as well as other individuals' memories and ideas about the 1950s/Fifties. Popular memory is a site where private and mediated memories interact. However, ideas about authenticity are crucial to perceptions of the past, and fuel many of the arguments about what is at stake in representing the past; what is 'true' and 'not true'.

Authenticity plays a dynamic role in revealing the contradictions that I have been teasing out of Fifties popular memory so far, and the following sections will more deeply analyse the role of a subjective sense of authenticity

in popular memory of the decade through aesthetic representations (film, television and objects), subcultures and memory. To do this, I firstly engage with arguments around historical authenticity, and the 'problems' of representation. I argue that a more sympathetic approach can be taken by utilising the debates of popular memory in order to fully appreciate the social, cultural and collective construction of perceptions of the past. Secondly, I analyse examples from film and television that have influenced perceptions of the 1950s and how these interact with notions of authenticity through nostalgia and pastiche. For example, the representations of the 1950s in BBC Two's *The Hour*, first broadcast in 2011, illustrates popular memory of 'the Fifties', inflected with the past-present relation combining historical touchstones with a representational style that mimics the mediated Fifties. I also explore the role of kitsch and trash in relation to authenticity and the Fifties revival through reference to the work of John Waters, the director of films such as the Fifties/Sixties-themed *Cry Baby* (1990) and *Hairspray* (1988).

I illustrate how these reconstructions in film and television have influenced what objects and styles are remembered as Fifties, and how these are often presented in terms of humour and pastiche. While I discuss television and film in the same section, I recognise that they are different media with specifically divergent production contexts, possibilities and potential audience experiences. However, I assert that their representing practices can be discussed together due to sharing qualities in 'period' style – the use of pastiche and referencing the history of television/film itself, for example. Indeed, the divisions between film and television have further blurred since the increase in opportunities for watching films at home rather than in the dark of the cinema

auditorium through VCR and DVD technologies, as well as streaming on the internet; or the potential for a continuous 'cinematic' experience through watching television series' on TV catch-up technology or series' box sets.

Connected to this exploration of television and film representations is the seemingly committed identity of Fifties enthusiasts, who as I have previously explored may interact with a 'subcultural' sensibility based on authenticity and belonging to a community. I argue that Fifties-influenced subcultures have had an impact on the styles of the period that have been remembered and here subcultural and historical authenticity intertwine. Interviewees illustrate the past-present relationship in perceptions of the 1950s through their own accounts of what is authentic for *them*, whether in their collecting and taste practices or in the relationship between this and their own personal history and memory. I argue that Fifties-style subcultural authenticities are frequently articulated in a contradictory way, which pivots between the individual self and the collective. Finally I examine material from the Mass Observation Project which further illustrates the link between memory and representation, and the way that notions of authenticity can be fluid and personal, related to making sense of individual identity.

The aim of this chapter is to explore the dynamics of authenticity that emerge in relation to various aspects of the Fifties revival in terms of media, subcultures and memory. I intend to go beyond value judgements of 'truth' against 'untruth' and try to find a more profitable analysis which takes in tandem both individual and collective representations and the way these always interact in the constantly circulating popular memory of the 1950s. It is more useful and revealing to think about *how people talk about authenticity*; the ways that

discourses around authenticity operate in making sense of the culture of the past in the present. Raphael Samuel's more democratic view of the construction of knowledge about the past is a prime example of this type of thinking. He states, 'The sense of the past, at any given point of time, is quite as much a matter of history as what happened in it' (1994, p.15), and his aim was to reveal the ways in which ideas about the past are contingent on context, place, personal history, and so on. An exploration of how the concept of authenticity is used in different contexts of talking about the past can unpick the tensions between what does and does not constitute 'legitimate' history as well as between shared public narratives of the past and personal subjective ones. As Raymond Williams suggests:

> A culture is common meanings, the product of a whole people, and offered individual meanings, the product of a man's whole committed personal and social experience. It is stupid and arrogant to suppose that any of these meanings can in any way be prescribed; they are made by living, made and remade, in ways we cannot know in advance. (Williams, 2002, p.98)

Indeed, culture and a sense of the past is a product of both private and public meanings, worked out through lived experience, and some of the work explored below – particularly in subcultural studies – has asserted the value of 'experience'. My work in this chapter seeks to problematise historical and cultural 'authenticity', which appears at first glance a structure with a set of distinct values and boundaries, but is actually produced, negotiated and reworked on a private and public level by institutions, collectives and individuals.

*Cultural studies and history: from 'false consciousness' to the circuit of culture*

The words used to discuss cultural and historical authenticity are most often loaded with value judgements. In some ways clichés, stereotypes and

‘fakes’ stand on one side of a divide with vintage, the iconic and ‘originals’ on the other. The politics at the heart of representing the past are often played out through arguments around authenticity and truth. The meanings of such terms are of course more fluid than a simple binary suggests, with words such as ‘kitsch’ and ‘nostalgia’ being even harder to place. The good/bad binary of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ taste is often unsettled by a sprinkle of irony. Indeed, popular memory levels the playing field in terms of what objects from or influenced by the past are able to communicate meaning: fakes, originals, vintage and retro all have something to say about the politics of the past. Raphael Samuel’s project was not only to suggest the benefits of using a plethora of sources from everyday life to illuminate historical study such as DIY magazines, television schedules and ‘retro’ clothes shops. He also had an important, inherently political project of reclaiming the account of the past from the condescension of professional historians in his championing of ‘unofficial knowledge’ which works against the academic and ‘very hierarchical view of the constitution of knowledge […] Fetishizing the act of research while ignoring its conditions of existence’ (1994, p.5). However, Samuel’s key point is that sources from everyday life should be taken seriously not only in terms of making sense of our past, but in terms of making sense of the *construction* of our idea of the past and history itself. In a similar sense, rather than focus on and maintain the boundaries between authentic historical truth and false popular culture, this chapter seeks to explore the processes by which an everyday, social sense of the past operates. Hence, I combine sources from and reflecting on everyday life: media, objects, and everyday biographies from the Mass Observation Project.

As I have explored elsewhere, in 1989 Christopher Chase and Malcolm Shaw reacted to the 'illustrated history' in which the past can be recorded, sampled, cut up and beamed back to us in a burgeoning mass visual media:

> We now have a deeply illustrated history…But the more richly endowed we are with images, the more detached those images become from the circumstances they purport to record. The past becomes a collection of competing voices and pictures which call our attention from the history books and from magazines: but the reality they represented becomes thin, denatured and inauthentic…It imposes a set of cultural and aesthetic filters between the reader and the richness, specificity and diversity of the past. (1989, p.10).

Here, the visual is automatically a medium of suspicion, transmitting 'comfortable and conveniently reassuring images of the past' (p.1) which simplify, generalise and muddle the timeline of history in all its variety. The popularity of these images, for Chase and Shaw, signalled a 'contemporary malaise', while they seem to be referring to an idea of the mediated melee of postmodernism as they describe the 'collection of competing words and pictures' (ibid.). In this depiction there is a clash here between some kind of knowable historical 'truth' and the falsifying 'illustrations' of our culture. Furthermore, there are distinct value judgements, which echo early twentieth century mass culture theorists' anxieties about high and low culture.[46] The superficiality of popular representations of the past is compared unfavourably to and distracting from apparently rigorous, academic research.

In terms of nostalgia as deception, Fred Davis has also suggested that thinkers on the left have framed nostalgia as a 'subspecies of false consciousness, moreover, a particularly insidious subspecies in that it does not merely serve to obscure further an awareness of class struggle but, in defiance

[46] Anxieties about mass popular culture and the breakdown of high/low cultural boundaries have been famously lamented by Horkheimer and Adorno (1972) and MacDonald (1963).

of the logic of historical dialectics, looks longingly backward to obsolete societal arrangements rather than forward to the better ones destined to emerge.' (1979, p.109). In a similar way, Michel Foucault was not as celebratory as Samuel about the potential for popular memory in the world of mass media, referring, like Chase and Shaw, to notions of authenticity and truth. He saw the potential for an 'oppositional' people's history in popular memory, but criticised the influence of popular culture in corrupting 'authentic' popular memory accounts of the past:

> There's a real fight going on…Over what we can roughly describe as popular memory. It's an actual fact that people – I'm talking about those who are barred from writing, from producing their books themselves, from drawing up their own historical accounts – that these people nevertheless do have a way of recording history, or remembering it, of keeping it fresh and using it…Now, a whole number of apparatuses have been set up ('popular literature', cheap books and the stuff that's taught in school as well) to obstruct the flow of this popular memory…Today cheap books aren't enough. There are much more effective means like television and the cinema. And I believe this was one way of reprogramming popular memory, which existed but had no way of expressing itself. So people are shown not what they were, but what they must remember having been. (1989, p.123)

Foucault envisions popular memory as a grass-roots folk history, kept alive in the 19th century through oral testimony such as folk stories and song (ibid.). His language above proposes a kind of 'infection' of popular memory; dominant institutions latch onto popular memory like a virus and disrupt its path for the dissemination of their own (false) ideologies about the past.

The notion of grand historical narratives as deception or 'false consciousness', has been explored and developed by theorists at the crossroads of historical, cultural and film studies. The influence of the notion of 'distortion' has also been asserted by film historians, such as Pierre Sorlin who also seems to implicate authenticity in his arguments between history and its

representation. For Sorlin, history is 'an attempt to clarify – to sort out what is probable from what is false, to establish the chronology of events' (1980, p.16). Conversely, 'Films are not a direct reflection of reality, but give a distorted image of society, restricting social conflicts to a limited environment, transferring from the social to the individual plane and arbitrarily shaped by the conventions of the genre.' (p.26). While it is true that there are certain 'limitations' to the filmic representation of the past which are related to the specific context of film industry production, I use this example to illustrate how arguments about the past and representations of the past frequently pivot on notions of authenticity and 'truth'. Historical references are interrogated in terms of being a clear process of production and reception – the idea that messages are transmitted to audiences who are deceived into a false view of the past. John Fiske (1992) has explored how work influenced by Stuart Hall from the 1970s onwards has moved away from the sense of culture and ideology as 'false consciousness' transmitted from the top down[47] (p.286). Influenced by the ideas of Althusser and Gramsci, the production and reception of culture is instead considered a messier site of conflict, contestation and contradiction, where there is the scope for the interpretation of the audience to read meanings in different ways. Rather than a theory based on a notion of culture with meanings written in and transmitted one way, from looking at television Hall developed his 'encoding/decoding' model of cultural reception into his 'circuit of culture' (Hall ed., 1997, p.1). Indeed, as explored by Nick Bentley, Stuart Hall and Paddy

[47] This approach has been widely adopted in the study of popular culture by those who have developed Gramsci's notion of the reception and production of culture in terms of a kind of war of tactics and negotiation, a power struggle in which the receivers of culture, whilst not overthrowing dominant structures, are able to exercise agency and resistance (Fiske, 1989, p.19). Other examples that take into account agency and negotiation in the use of culture and objects include Appadurai (1988), Ing (1989), Strinati (1995).

Whannel's work in the 1960s aimed to demonstrate the possibilities for ordinary peoples' agency (and indeed, the role of their own 'authentic' experience) in creating culture:

> Here [in the work of Hall/Whannel], the sense of youth subculture 'reflecting' an inherent false consciousness has gone and been replaced by a focus on the cultural production of youth as an 'authentic' response. (Bentley, 2005, p.73)

Bentley explores how Hall moved towards more an analysis of the *aesthetics* of youth culture as a response to cultural conditions, rather than false consciousness. His alignment of youth culture with agency and the idea of a 'cultural avant-garde' paved the way for the later stylistic analysis of youth Dick Hebdige in *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (Bentley, 2005, p.72).

*Cultural history and postmodernity*

My approach in this project has been strongly influenced by those thinkers who posit that cultural production and consumption is not a passive exercise, and who opened up the possibility for participation and influence 'from below'. This leads one to consider *what people actually do* with culture, rather than reading textual analysis alone to decode what culture means. While accepting that there is an argument to be had about what is at stake for history if people are free to think and do what they like with images of the past, I believe an argument comparing 'authentic' accounts with 'inauthentic' accounts is not an illuminating one. This fails to recognise the possibilities for understanding the processes by which common-sense ideas of the past are made and indeed, how they make meaning for the present. Furthermore, while scholars such as Chase and Shaw have been particularly concerned with protecting historical 'authenticity' from the evils of representation, other historical discourses such as Samuel's argue for less static notions of what

does and does not constitute 'history'. As Billie Melman notes, a scholarship of cultural history has developed in tandem with cultural studies, to consider the production of history and ideas about the past as not a wholly passive, top-down process. She acknowledges the shift from '*auteurs* and texts towards readers and spectators, viewers and listeners' (2006, p.18) and draws on Michel de Certeau's characterisation of consumption and everyday life as an exchange and negotiation (ibid.). This has also been influenced by the development of social and oral history, which also frequently aim to challenge history as a grand narrative or simple chronology.

It is worth briefly discussing the breaking down of traditional historical hierarchies and cultural structures as potentially read through theories of postmodernism, a term which is often used to analyse a post-war mediated culture, freewheeling and image-led. For example, for Fredric Jameson, postmodernity is theorised by 'a new depthlessness, which finds its prolongation both in contemporary "theory" and in a whole new culture of the image or the simulacrum; a consequent weakening of historicity, both in our relationship to public history and in the new forms of our private temporality' (1992, p.6). Jameson notes that postmodernity is frequently aligned with 'the end of the 1950s or early 1960s' (p.1), coalescing around a focus on signs and language, proliferated by new ways of expression and technologies. There is a fluidity of meaning in cultural forms and a 'waning of affect' in depthless representations (p.10). Jameson is not merely *describing* postmodern art, but exploring the conditions and cultural products which led to a postmodern analysis to emerge as a 'cultural dominant' amongst others (p.4).

Jameson's work is useful for pinning down the possibilities for playing

with the past to the mid-twentieth century and new technologies, attributing the popularity of retro to 'an addiction to the photographic image [as a] tangible symptom of an omnipresent, omnivorous, and well-nigh libidinal historicism.' (ibid.). Indeed, while retro has a longer history, the possibilities for playing with the past have arguably been influenced greatly by the proliferation of cheap media and photographic technologies as well as online culture which allows history to become a 'vast collection of images, a multitudinous photographic simulacrum' (ibid.) which blends both original and reproduced/reconstructed images. Jameson illustrates his ambivalence about such phenomena:

> the advanced capitalist countries today are now a field of stylistic and discursive heterogeneity without a norm. Faceless masters continue to inflect the economic strategies which constrain our existences, but they no longer need to impose their speech (or are henceforth unable to); and the postliteracy of the late capitalist world reflects not only the absence of any great collective project but also the unavailability of the older national language itself. (p.17)

For Jameson, while the interpretation of the free play of cultural representations and identities can undermine efforts to impose ideologies on individuals, it simultaneously focuses people as subjective individuals and prevents collective identification and action. Jameson frequently arises as a reference for exploring historical authenticity and popular culture, combining a discussion of developments in technology for reproducing the past with the effect on historicity, narrative and the development of history a plaything, a product of the society of the spectacle (p.18).

Jameson's assessment of nostalgia, film and postmodernity remains a touchstone for more recent assessments of mediated history and popular culture, for example Guffey's analysis of retro (2006), Sprengler's analysis of nostalgia and the Fifties (2009) or Philip Drake's analysis of 90s 'retro cinema'

which is 'less concerned with a theorisation of waning historicity than with offering attention to the stylisation of the past in retro-cinema' (2003, pp.190-191). Linda Hutcheon (1998) has questioned Jameson's take on postmodernism with a view of nostalgia that takes into account the function of 'knowingness' and irony. She also suggests that the effect of his analysis is to 'generalize the term "postmodernism" into a synonym for the contemporary' and 'abandon its historical and cultural specificity' (Hutcheon, 1998). Furthermore, Jameson's dismay about the postmodern lack of 'historicity' has also been questioned in the developing interdisciplinary analysis of popular and collective memory, as Hodgkin and Radstone note:

> Over the last few decades there has been a broadening out of the category of the memory text into collective rather than subjective contexts, and non-narrative as well as narrative forms. Interpretation reaches far beyond the limits of autobiography, finding memory texts in places old – medieval spiritual writings, folk songs, patchwork quilts – and new – photographs, department stores, websites.
> (2003, p.13).

I shall develop some of these critiques further below as I explore further the relationship between nostalgia, pleasure and retro. One can argue that collective identifications are possible through the use of shared cultural histories. As noted by Hodgkin and Radstone above, this has not only been enabled by shared cultural media such as writings and visual culture but also accelerated by the multiple sharing and representational possibilities of the internet.[48] Furthermore, while a postmodern reading of retro could be taken

[48] The internet can be seen as both producer of and repository for memory, a melting pot of 'authenticity' and 'inauthenticity'. In a few seconds one can search for 'the 1950s' via Google images and survey thousands of original and reproduction images on the same page. Furthermore, it has been utilised in new ways for both gathering social histories such as the Southbank Centre's collection of memories of the Festival of Britain for their revival in 2011 (Southbank Centre website, 'Festival memories') or through interactive ways of personalising the past and connecting people to history with games such as the BBC's 'You In '52' app or their interactive 'People's War' website, as explored by Noakes, 2013.

pessimistically as an interest only in the thin, inauthentic image and surface of things, I refute this by deconstructing the binary between authenticity and representation. Rather than reading the Fifties revival as a text, I interrogate this as a practice and a process through the various strands of popular memory, where the proliferation of historical images intersect with public representations, collective reconstructions, private memories, official histories, and so on, on both an individual and collective level to create a sense of the past.

*Re-presenting the 1950s on screen: nostalgia and the visual pleasures of the past*

It is worth here reappraising Jameson's analysis of nostalgia. Jameson was particularly interested in the 1950s and focused on the era as an example of representations of the past defined by periodisation based on 'a list of stereotypes, of ideas of facts and historical realities' (1992, p.279). Jameson's notion of '*ideas* of facts and historical realities' reflects the notion that the past could now be viewed through postmodernism as a series of narratives and interchangeable aspects of the past caused by the 'random cannibalization of all styles of the past' (p.18). He acknowledges that depictions of the 1950s are often used as critiques of the era itself, such as 'against the Eisenhower era and its complacency' (ibid.) but still recognises the appeal of the era in that, 'for Americans at least, the 1950s remain the privileged object of desire' (p.19). When discussing the 'nostalgia film', Jameson refers to *American Graffiti* (1972) – set in the early 1960s, but often associated with the teenage-rock 'n' roll image of Fifties America – as an example of the pure spectacle of period films and their vague presentation of eras. For Jameson, the nostalgia film 'was never a matter of some old-fashioned "representation" of historical content, but instead approached the "past" through stylistic connotation, conveying

“pastness” by the glossy qualities of the image, and “1930s-ness” or “1950s-ness”’. (p.19). Hindsight and visual culture allow the definition of the past through recognisable eras and generations so that ‘the history of aesthetic styles displaces “real” history’ (p.20). Jameson therefore asserted that there is a difference between the historical realities of the 1950s and the idea of ‘the “fifties”’ (p.281). There is evidently a tension here between a self-referential mediated representation and ‘real history’, because mass media is inherently defined by visual modes. Jameson proposed that the image and profile attributed to the era are strongly delineated by self-referential ‘cultural sources’: ‘the attributes with which we have endowed the period […] seem very precisely to derive from its own television programs; in other words, its own representations of itself.’ (ibid.). While I agree that the popular culture products of a particular era do tend to influence the popular memory of that time, there is much that this relationship reveals about the construction of historical knowledge as well as the interaction between past and present.

Jameson raises many questions in relation to representations of the past and authenticity, in terms of what is at stake when the past is played with stylistically and reconstructed through its own cultural referents. Some of the historians discussed above would most certainly suggest there is a problem with the past becoming depthless, commodified, and at the mercy of trends and fashions. Furthermore, Jameson argued that the shallow, image-led nature of postmodern analysis of representations of the past could have implications for a shared collective sense of history and culture. In this section I will explore the representing practices of TV and film representations of the 1950s, as well as potential readings of this. Jameson’s notion of historicity is bound up with ideas

about authenticity and the recorded historical fact; how is this broken down in representations of the 1950s and what is the implication? How does this impact potentially on broader collective memory of the 1950s? I also argue that the qualities Jameson identified in postmodern analysis of historical representations can be interrogated in a more complex way with an approach that also takes in the way people respond to and contribute to culture rather than viewing them as passive cultural consumers.

As part of my analysis I will explore the ways in which the Fifties are frequently performed in terms of humour, pastiche and irony. Linda Hutcheon has analysed the function of irony in relation to Jameson's discussion of nostalgia. I agree with her assessment of nostalgia as moving away from a medicalised condition but becoming a response to more mediated representations of the past; nostalgia is 'rarely the past as actually experienced, of course; it is the past as imagined, as idealized through memory and desire. In this sense, nostalgia is less about the past than about the present.' (Hutcheon, 1998). However, while rightfully recognising the role of irony in nostalgic representations as expressing nostalgia's potentially critical faculty, there are some contradictions in her efforts to distinguish between what is and what isn't 'critical' nostalgia. She states that irony is not written into objects, 'irony and nostalgia are not qualities of *objects*; they are responses of subjects' (ibid.); indeed, this relates to some of my discussions below on kitsch and camp. However, she then seems to suggest that are some nostalgic objects which are inherently *not* ironic (critical) – such as 'commercial nostalgia' – and other 'postmodern' ones which are:

> Our contemporary culture is indeed nostalgic; some parts of it – postmodern parts – are aware of the risks and lures of nostalgia, and seek to expose those through irony. (ibid.)

While Hutcheon's injection of irony into the nostalgia and authenticity debate is useful, in a similar way to Boym she could be seen as creating a hierarchy of critical and uncritical nostalgia. My response to this is to look at nostalgia through the actual responses of individuals to nostalgic objects, in order to better understand how nostalgia operates. Christine Sprengler has taken up the idea of the Fifties as holding a particularly 'privileged status in the nostalgia industry' (2009, p.40). However, she is interested in the more dialogic relationship between history and nostalgia which I am following, in terms of the relationship between the historical time of 'the 1950s' and the more mythical, imaginary 'Fifties'. As Sprengler asserts about the 'nostalgia film', in the next section I discuss how 'the visual – through the practices of surface realism and deliberate archaism – can be put to creative uses that initiate engagements with history, nostalgia and the uses of the past in the present.' (p.90).

*The British Fifties reimagined on television: The Hour*

This section interrogates Jameson's ideas about nostalgia and representing the past, through looking at a recent British television version of the Fifties, *The Hour*, a short-lived series which may have initially ridden the wave of the popularity of *Mad Men*.[49] A glossy-looking drama which mixes and matches glamorous and iconic 'looks' for the characters (in that 'vague' sense of the past discussed by Jameson), *The Hour* was critiqued by founder member

[49] Indeed, press coverage made inevitable comparisons such as Thorpe (2011) or Paskin (2012), whose article suggested the confusing and interchangeable nature of popular representations of the late 1950s and early 1960s: 'This 1960s English series resembles "Mad Men," if the NYC admen show focused on [Mad Men characters] Peggy Olson and Michael Ginsberg' (Paskin, 2012). *The Hour* is in fact set in 1956.

of ITN Lynne Reid Banks. She measured it against her own actual experience of the era, judging its details to be plain 'wrong', stating:

> The BBC is very good at period drama – world-famous for getting the details right. But judging by The Hour, its drama serial based on television news in the 50s, they can only do it if the period is far enough in the past so that nobody now living remembers it.
> (Reid Banks, 2011).

Here, the authenticity of lived experience is held up as a measure of truth against representations, an idea I will interrogate later in this chapter in my section on Mass Observation. Indeed, while Reid Banks is at pains to point out the lived realities of the early days of television current affairs, being that she is analysing a period drama, she cannot resist a poke at the *visual* detail too of programme producer Bel Rowley's glamorous look: 'I'm sorry to dwell on appearances, but what is Bel wearing? Our one female producer, Di Edwards-Jones, a dynamic and motor-mouthed Welshwoman, wore whatever came to hand' (ibid.). Banks is highly protective over her 'authentic' memories, suggesting the early days of broadcast current affairs were 'Much more interesting and marvellous than the gallimaufry of errors and fudgings that constitutes *The Hour*. Those early days were important and I want them guarded, not misrepresented.' (Reid Banks, 2011).

In particular, the second series of *The Hour* called up 'social problem' depictions of British films of the post-war such as *The Blue Lamp* (1950) and *Sapphire* (1959) with issues that in some ways would not have seemed out of place in the popular post-war police drama inspired by *The Blue Lamp*, *Dixon of Dock Green* (1955 – 1976). The plot of the series is based on the journalists' exploration of corruption and violence surrounding a London 'vice' club, but still shows evidence of present hindsight as it takes a reflexive stance on some

other social issues frequently associated with the 1950s: gangsters, misogyny and racism. The fictional news programme (also entitled *The Hour*) features discussions and an investigative style which evokes the robust debates of more contemporary programmes such as BBC's *Newsnight*, with sensational revelations and debates on controversial 1950s topics such as the legalisation of homosexuality, racism and the nuclear threat. In some ways *The Hour* becomes a run-through of 1950s historical highlights, with a mixing of historical details and a clear position of present hindsight and historical reflection. Journalist Freddie Lyon stages a dramatic on-air stand-off between a black immigrant doctor and a young fascist, while lead presenter Hector Madden is made to explore his own misogyny – he starts the series dismissing night club dancing girls as cheap thrills and devious liars, but ends the series helping to expose the criminality of the male owner of a night club while also reconciling with his wife, now a successful cookery presenter. There are shades of the present here as the audience is presented with glamorous costumes and noir-esque sets that reference Hollywood history, while a liberal 21st century audience can identify with the morality of *The Hour*'s journalists as they challenge some of the more stereotyped bigotry of the Fifties and revise their own beliefs.

While there is a sense that *The Hour* is self-consciously performing vague '1950s-ness', I argue it does so in such a self-conscious way that the viewer can easily be aware of the fabrication. Certain characters resemble typical Fifties stereotypes, such as Marnie, the wife of Hector. With her immaculate up-do and full skirted frocks, she resembles the immaculate presentation of the retro 'time warp wife' Joanne Massey or the iconic suburban

housewife parodied on in the inside cover of Nigella's *How To Be A Domestic Goddess*. Indeed, Marnie even more personifies the *mediated* domestic goddess when she gains her own cookery programme on rival channel ITV, echoing Fanny Cradock's playful cooking tutorials and signifying the birth of the TV cook during the 1950s (Hardyment, 1995, p.52). There is also the sense that in representations of the past for entertainment, the audience does not require 'realism', and is perfectly aware of the performative nature of representations. As one of the comments below the Reid Banks' article suggests, this is a creative interpretation of the 1950s for the purposes of entertainment: 'I can remember the fifties (just about) and I'm quite sure that an accurate representation of the period would have people switching off in their thousands.' (Reid Banks, comments section, 2011). As Jameson would have it, *The Hour* is an example of representations of the past which focus on surface details, motifs and myths – a vague notion of period rather than genuine historicity. However, not only does the style of these productions frequently make the audience aware that what they are viewing is a fabrication, what also emerges from these self-referential depictions is the potential to explore the workings and construction of history itself.

*Visual media, 'time travel' and collective memory*

I will now explore further the idea of TV and film representations of the past as being able to interrogate the nature of historical time and memory. *The Hour* is highly self-referential – broadcast on BBC, about the early days of the BBC; a media depiction of the past that more revisits the history of television itself than an authentic depiction of the 1950s. As Robert Hanke has observed,

media technologies have allowed changes in the viewer's experience of space and time, suggesting that:

> Historians took it upon themselves to reconnect the present to the past at the very moment that new media – the telegraph and the daily newspaper – began to dissolve previous barriers of space and time. In the last decades of the twentieth-century, we began to live within an accelerated modernity, represented by a new time/space compression that began in the 1970s, and a shift from the mode of production to the "mode of information". (2003, p.61)

The visual screening of the past via television and cinema have allowed a kind of time travel, since the early years of various media presentation, as explored by Christina Lee:

> Even in proto-cinematic forms, such as the stereoscope, panorama, diorama, and daguerreotype, the audience was transported some*where* and some *time* else. New technologies allowed the past to be brought into the present, memory to be "captured" in the still image, and the experimentation with temporal and spatial manipulation through movement onscreen. (Lee, 2008, p.3)

In an even more complex and intimate way than the cinema experience, Raphael Samuel has explored how television can shake up the nature of time in terms of various channels and television schedules:

> In one register, television offers us a past that is completely static: a time when family was the backbone of society, when 'old-fashioned' virtues were unquestioned and everyone knew their place…an escape from the disorders and uncertainties of the present…In another, all is movement and we are whirled about in a kaleidoscope of change: a hundred years of American history are rushed through in a dozen episodes. (1994, p.14)

Indeed, this quality of television has been critiqued for its selectivity and as a medium for forgetting, as Steve Anderson has explored in the American context: 'TV, so the argument goes, can produce no lasting sense of history; at worst, it actually impedes viewers' ability to receive, process, or remember information about the past.' (2003, p.19). But Anderson has a more nuanced view, which takes into account the intimate nature of the television medium to

explore its active role in the construction of history. He argues for memory as a kind of archaeology, 'in which the goal is not simply to uncover something that has been buried, but to discover how and why additional layers have been built on top of it. (2003, p.23). Amy Holdsworth has similarly moved on from the idea of television as manipulating memory, exploring the medium as a repository for collective histories in the form of archival material and national commemorations, as well as affecting 'everyday memory-making within and in relation to the home and the family' (2011, p.3) through its intimate relationship in the home. Furthermore, for Holdsworth:

> Television is arguably responsible for the construction of a popular iconography of nostalgia, and though not alone, it can be seen to build and reinforce a series of visual repertoires which refer to a specific era or period, or combine selected and selective images, objects, sounds and soundtracks to connote an appropriate sense of 'pastness'. (p.98)

This echoes Jameson's descriptions of the way that the past is represented in nostalgic film representations, creating recognisable aesthetic markers for certain eras.

Relevant here is Holdsworth's point that the relationship between television and history becomes even more intimate as it frequently becomes concerned with screening parts of its own history. She argues that 'television about television' can reveal much about 'television's own memory cultures and their influence on the construction of broader cultural memories.' (p.96). Indeed, Holdsworth mentions as part of nostalgic television the popularity of 'list TV' such as VH1's *I Love…* series, each dedicated to a year within the 1970s, 1980s or 1990s (2011, p.98) which frequently celebrate the everyday cultural artefacts from the past and rekindle the desirability of certain objects and revivals. She cites Joe Moran who proposes that these programmes illustrate

'how easily the banal objects of everyday life […] can be invested with affective meaning'. (Qtd. in Holdsworth 2011, p.101). Holdsworth also cites BBC's *Life On Mars* series, in which a detective is transported back to the 1970s. While apparently aiming to challenge nostalgia for the 1970s, the series is an example of the self-reflexivity of certain period representations of the past such as *The Hour*, which reference popular cultural forms rather than real experience, as Holdsworth notes, 'the detail of everyday life in 1973 is filtered through television's past and its self-conscious use of the crime genre' (p.110).

*Life On Mars* represents a version of the 1970s straight out of 1970s police drama *The Sweeney* and has other small televisual references such as the use of the test card girl in detective Sam's dreams. Hence, the representation of the 1970s becomes more a demonstration of the collective memory of television, rather than specific historical memory of events of the 1970s. However, these markers such as the test card girl make use of shared cultural history which is intimately bound up with audiences' actual subjective histories. Hence, I argue that these perhaps 'inauthentic' representations of memory do not destroy collective affiliations, but instead actually tap into other collective identifications and histories of television and popular culture. And with *Life On Mars*' particularly literal time-travel motif with Sam's trip back to the 1970s, 'Whilst the nostalgic text is inhabited by forms of longing and loss, a capacity to be critical is also produced by the nostalgic appraisal of who we were and how we have changed.' (Holdsworth, 2011, p.112). Here, TV representations can illustrate the fluid and questionable nature of history, revealing their own 'inauthenticity' by representing themselves through self-reference. Indeed, even clichéd versions of the past, when viewed with present

hindsight and often with irony or humour, can raise discussions and debates about the differences and similarities between then and now. They are frequently enjoyed and consumed with an awareness of how they interact with other narratives of the past. I will discuss this further below in the section where I focus on some Mass Observation correspondence regarding memory and images of the 1950s.

Related to televisual histories is the idea of pleasure, which I have touched on previously in terms of the aspects of choice and consumption in what is 'remembered' and 'forgotten' in the 1950s style revival. In part this ability to pick and choose can be seen as related and influenced by the presentation of mediated memory. Indeed, the realm of fantasy and imagination is fed into by popular culture – collective and personal memory is expressed and imagined through music, film, TV and communication technologies such as the internet.[50] My approach to this relationship through popular memory makes this a dialogic relationship rather than a hierarchical one. Paul Frosh has also specifically examined *Life On Mars* as a way of exploring the 'entanglement of memory and imagination' (2011, p.117). He explores how memory and imagination have been thought of as opposite terms, with memory having connotations of 'what can be recalled because it once *was*' (p.120), whereas the imagination is more connected to '*what might have been*' (p.121). Frosh explores how the depictions in *Life On Mars* crosses the boundaries between memory and imagination in terms of referencing television's own history and its embedding in our own lives; 'television as a

[50] For more examples of studies exploring the intersection of media and collective/individual memory see, for example, Jose Van Dijck (2006) on the relationship between personal memory and popular music and Neiger, Meyers, Zandberg eds. (2011) which explores collective memory across a variety of new media.

place through which we imagine memory.' (p.130). Furthermore, Frosh challenges the idea of mediated memories as preventing collective affiliations:

> Television *re-collects* as a working spatial assemblage both memory objects from the 1970s (clothes, décor, cars, offices, hairstyles, etc) and mediated-memory sequences from the 1970s (music, cultural icons, narrative scripts familiar from the period's television programming) […]. At the same time television *re-collects* its audience as participants in this act of synchronous remembering, gathering them together as a collective in the reimagining of a past shared in and through television. (p.129).

The imaginary world of the television actually serves as a medium for connectivity; the television object's conspicuous role in *Life On Mars* as well as the programme's representational style references other well-known popular cultural artefacts. This relies on a presumed literacy in the audience of television's own history and a shared understanding of its codes and references.

This self-referential element is a key part of historical representation in film and television; copying and imitating the past through pastiche and parody. For Jameson, there is a distinction between parody and pastiche, whereby pastiche as a cultural expression of postmodernism is:

> a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists. Pastiche is thus blank parody, a statue with blind eyeballs. (1992, p.17)

As Jameson has pointed out, and as I have illustrated above with *The Hour*, many period reconstructions of the 1950s are self-referential, referencing mediated versions and motifs of the 1950s rather than perhaps 'genuine' history. I explore this further in the next section on more American representations of the Fifties, influenced by Hollywood film and American icons.

*The American Fifties, film and fantasy*

In terms of influencing popular cultural images and memories of the 1950s, it is frequently American representations where Fifties material culture becomes truly iconic, such as old Hollywood films and stars, as well as the bright colours and high-school optimism of *Grease* or *Mad Men*'s stylish depiction of the Madison Avenue set in New York of the early 1960s onwards. Indeed, these representations then feed into the desire for iconic objects and settings in real life, such as one questionnaire respondent who suggested that the series *Mad Men* is 'pure porn for me' (Linda q/r). As well as the colourful appeal of images of the American Fifties (as explored in the last chapter through iconic visual myths of Fifties America), there is also the influence of the transatlantic sharing of culture through exported Hollywood cinema and television programmes. Indeed, in response to a Mass Observation Project directive in Spring 2003, correspondents were asked where their images of the period came from. Many agreed that their images came from TV and film representations such as *Grease* and *Happy Days*, while other films were referenced which are not even specifically set in the era but which evoked a sense of 'pastness' in terms of conformity and small-town American life, *The Truman Show* (1998) and *Edward Scissorhands* (1990).

As I have already discussed elsewhere with Raphael Samuel's assessment of period drama, there is frequently an attention to surface detail with films and television that represent the past, which paradoxically subverts authenticity by making the past seem strange and alienates the audience from a sense of 'real' history. Clearly, mixed with some authentic 'detail' is a mixture of stylistic elements, some taken from popular culture history, and some from other eras entirely. This brings to mind Richard Dyer's idea of pastiche which is

defined by the notion of 'mixing up' (2006). While Dyer admits that the word pastiche is difficult to pin down, he takes it back to its Italian roots, 'pasticcio' which at its earliest use meant a pie, 'a mixed dish' (p.8) and combination 'such that the identities of the ingredients remain largely intact, albeit modified by their interaction and by being eaten all together' (p.9-10). Furthermore, for Dyer, irony, humour and *knowingness* are a key point of pastiche which, 'imitates other art in such a way as to make consciousness of this fact central to its meaning and affect.' (p.4). Although pastiche is false and unauthentic, it becomes a blatant flouting of historical rules, an amusing joke and a source of pleasure. I would not necessarily agree with Jameson that pastiche is passive and empty compared to parody. Despite its games and imitations, for Dyer:

> [Pastiche] can, at its best, allow us to feel our connection to the affective frameworks, the structures of feeling, past and present, that we inherit and pass on. That is to say, it can enable us to know ourselves affectively as historical beings. (2006, p.180)

Furthermore, in many ways it is used in an ironic fashion to question the notions of an earlier era, or challenge the relationship between now and then. As Pam Cook has analysed with *Far From Heaven* (2002), a film also explored by Dyer:

> Nostalgic fictions depend upon a slippage between current styles and period fashion in order to draw audiences in to the experience. The past is presented as a site for a complex imaginative encounter, combining fantasy, emotion and critical judgement, to which the knowledge that it can never be fully retrieved is essential. (Cook, 2005, p.11)

*Far From Heaven* uses the setting and costume of a 1950s Douglas Sirk melodrama alongside plot twists and an open display of infidelity, homosexuality and inter-racial attraction that would have been too controversial for Sirk's original films. In this way, the past is represented, not as fixed and idealised, but rather as 'turbulent and unsettled, as a liminal realm that provides an outlet

for escapist fantasy.' (p.12). In this respect, *Far From Heaven* is similar to *The Hour* in that it focuses on the Fifties as a site of social tension and oppression from a position of present hindsight. Cook's points illustrate that this tension between nostalgia, fantasy and critique helps the viewer to take a playful and questioning relationship with the representation of the past. The very visibility of the 'present' in media representations, the self-consciousness use of 'screen' history and overtly hyperbolic depictions of the past flag up to the viewer that the past can never really be rendered 'true' but perhaps only as a performative and subjective construction. This is an argument elaborated by Christine Sprengler who suggests that 'nostalgia's reliance on visual and material culture facilitates recognition of the significance of images of the past in forming and mediating conceptions of history. It also reveals the extent to which history has been inscribed – and can thus be accessed – through material culture.' (2009, pp.63 – 64). There is an acknowledgement here that through self-reflexive reconstructions of the past an audience can explore and gain literacy in the interpretation of representations of the past.

Implicated in the idea of consciousness and irony is the fact that in some of the objects and styles that are revered by Fifties revivalists there is a relationship between pastiche and a valorisation of the aesthetics of 'trash'. It is possible to attribute this to film representations that pastiche the Fifties, as well as the elevation to antique status of many mid-century domestic and household items; the ephemera of everyday life. Some of these items can appear desirably in their very throwaway or 'bad taste' status. For example, Linda associates a love of the Fifties with a love of 'kitsch':

> At first it was a morbid fascination with the kitschness but that grew into true love. If the house was burning down I would still save my 3D poodle

> portrait and collection of Hawaiian shirts. I'd say my taste in style is still a mix of kitsch and mid-century modern. (Linda, q/r)

There is a clear relationship created between the objects and styles of the Fifties and the idea of trash and kitsch – the styles of the past are seen humorously with hindsight and 'knowingness', very much in a similar way to the way that pastiche transposes past and present in order to alienate and play with the past. Film representations have a role to play in this relationship, and Emma specifically mentions the film director John Waters and his own obsessions and collecting practices as an influence on her tastes. Waters' persona has been developed through his writings such as *Crackpot* (2003) which details his own love for an eclectic mix of pop and trash culture from horror movies like *The Bad Seed* (1956) to Liberace to *Pyromania*, a 1951 textbook on 'pathological fire setting' (Waters, 2003, p.68). His films also illustrate a reverence for teenage popular culture as well as the cultural detritus of 1950s and 1960s America. It can be said that Waters' cult status has been both produced by, and influential on, the taste for 1950s retro. Waters' films *Hairspray* (1988) and *Cry Baby* (1990) particularly pastiched the 1950s and 1960s. Both set in his hometown of Baltimore, *Hairspray* (1988) explored issues of 1960s racism through an overweight, working-class teen and her breakthrough into the cliquey world of a youth TV dance show. *Cry Baby* (1990) used recognisable images of teen delinquency with caricatured depictions of 'drapes' and 'squares', featuring over-the-top performances from a cast including a young Johnny Depp.

I use this discussion to argue for the contribution of media representations to a desire for kitsch or 'bad taste' objects, the dynamics of which will be discussed further below in terms of the significance of second

hand shopping and buying 'trash'. These interests operate in a similar way to the enjoyment and pleasure of representations of the 1950s in film and television, which with its aesthetic over-exaggeration and use of stereotypes not only alienates the viewer from any real history but also plays on the literacy of the viewer to enjoy the irony and share in a collective popular cultural history and mythology. While it is not necessarily used in an *overtly* critical matter, pastiche draws attention to the nature of imitation, enabling the viewer to ultimately see through the representation and critique the depiction being presented. There is a pleasure inherent in pastiche, but the viewer is unable to directly identify with the representation truly as a historical record because of techniques of distancing and over-exaggeration. The Fifties in particular has become inherently associated with humour, fun and whimsicality, much of which stems from a present position of hindsight, as well as the pastiche of the era that has come out of film and television re-presentations since the 1950s itself.

*Re-presenting the Fifties in objects and things: retro, trash and kitsch*

John Waters' 1972 film, the transgressive *Pink Flamingos*, symbolised his pastiche-trash aesthetic in the icon of the plastic pink flamingo ornament that adorns the lawn of the central character's pink mobile home. Indeed, it is Waters' use of the pink flamingo that is Abigail Tucker's opening reference in her brief history of the iconic plastic lawn ornament (Tucker, 2012). Designed in 1957 as a 'working class accessory' to add a unique tropical look to suburban front lawns, it was subsequently rejected for its plastic tackiness before being reclaimed in the 1980s as a cult object:

> By the mid-1980s, the flamingos were transitioning […] to an elaborate upper-class inside joke. They furnished colorful substitutes for croquet wickets and clever themes for charity galas. The bird became a sort of

> plastic punch line, and, at worst, a way of hinting at one's own good taste by reveling in the bad taste of others. (ibid.)

There is a class and taste politics which runs through retro, where participants distinguish their practices through taking a position of humour and cleverness – such as using 'working-class' objects ironically. Indeed, kitsch and bad taste, though with its own distinctive history, can also be imbued with the politics of camp. Andy Medhurst has noted that 'Trying to define camp is like trying to sit in the corner of a circular room.' (1991, p.154) but I will acknowledge a few links between kitsch and camp here. It could be said that kitsch is more inherently related to an object, whereas camp is, according to Medhurst, 'an experiential rather than an analytical discourse […] Camp is primarily an adjective, occasionally a verb, but never anything as prosaic, as earth-bound, as a noun.' (1991, p.155). Curtis F. Brown described the difference thus:

> Kitsch may be ludicrous in its attempts to impress the naïve, but humor is not its goal. If it arrives there at all […] it is inadvertent. […] kitsch is blissfully unaware of being anything but appealing and desirable. Camp, however, offers incongruities in glorious self-awareness. (1975, p.14)

Ironically for an analysis of kitsch, Brown seems to deny the function of any kind of meaning or critique in a kitsch object: 'kitsch doesn't *mean*, it only *is*.' (p.9). The attribution of kitsch to objects potentially lies in kitsch's origins in the late 19th century as a term for 'bad', popular art (Gillilan, 2003, p.8).

However, while in one way art critics such as Gillo Dorfles (1969) have critiqued the objects of kitsch, in another way kitsch can be seen not as a fixed meaning or as inherently *present* in an object but in a rather similar way to camp as a kind of transformation of meaning through reception and the process of display. Medhurst explores how camp can work in different ways using Hollywood films arguing that certain films 'were taken up *as* camp, teased by

primarily gay male audiences into yielding meaning not intended by their makers' whereas '*Whatever Happened To Baby Jane?* is a piece of self-conscious camp, capitalizing on certain attitudinal and stylistic tendencies known to exist in audiences.' (1991, p.155). Indeed, kitsch can be played on in the representation of objects: corporations may capitalise on reproducing certain 'kitsch' objects such as the reproduction pink flamingo – or it can be a matter of *who is reading* the object.[51] More recent writing on kitsch by Leslie Gillilan illustrates the taste hierarchies at play in reclaiming patriotic souvenirs as she states: 'British Royal Family memorabilia, largely produced to commemorate pivotal moments in history, tends to appeal to the flag-waving patriot; but there is something here to fit the kitsch aesthete, too.' (2003, p.23). It is clear that the 'kitsch aesthete' is expected to distinguish his/herself from 'the flag-waving patriot'. Indeed, more recent writings on kitsch have conflated it with this kind of 'knowing' assembly of objects and with objects associated with the Fifties in particular, such as Lesley Gillilan's assertion that kitsch is:

> no longer pejorative. There is no dictionary that yet defines kitsch as a cultish modern trend that sees educated aesthetes shamelessly embracing pink-plastic lawn flamingos, plaster poodles, or indeed, worthless pretentious art. (p.8)

She goes on to illustrate the potential 'knowingness' of kitsch by quoting John Waters that 'In order to acquire bad taste, one must have very, very good taste' (ibid.) and that 'the 1950s was the kitsch aesthetic's pivotal moment – a rich concentration of whimsy, the like of which has never been seen before or since.' (p.13). Clearly the use of kitsch, camp and 'trash' play into the taste distinctions of retro based on knowledge, irony and middle class taste.

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[51] Ruth Holliday and Tracey Potts' edited collection (2012) also aims to explore kitsch as a process of reception and interpretation related to politics of taste, rather than being fixed to particular objects.

While distinctions between ‘kitsch’ and ‘camp’ are slippery, I illustrate how they have crossed over as popular aesthetic modes of exploring the Fifties in ways that use irony and pastiche through objects and interpretation. Susan Sontag’s depiction of camp blurred the lines between knowing ‘camp’ performance as well as ‘camp’ objects, the latter sometimes being interpreted as ‘kitsch’ (2001). Without getting bogged down in the debate of the difference between camp and kitsch, it is fair to say they both frequently utilise a means of display which depend on an irony and knowingness in the reception by an audience. Furthermore, the artifice of camp suggests it is not a passive performance. Camp can utilise stereotypes and myths in order to question and resist, as Pamela Robertson has explored with her notion of ‘feminist camp’, where gender rules are questioned through the revelation of gender as construction in the over-exaggerated performance of femininity by figures such as Mae West and Madonna (1996). Similarly, kitsch is generally *not* authentic, it suggests mass production and an imitation of authenticity, such as the souvenirs described by Brown, ‘Although burnished gold vaguely suggests the old fashioned or traditional, that idea was spawned in some kitschman’s imagination.’ (1975, p.10).

Related to the idea of kitsch is the association of the Fifties with a sense of fun and irony, perhaps influenced, for example, by the valorisation of throwaway domestic items which become ‘kitsch’ as well as the role of colour photography and Hollywood imagery on popular memory of the Fifties which encourage pastiche in different contexts. Following Jameson, it can be seen that perceptions of the 1950s have been greatly influenced by both media sources produced during the era (for example, old Hollywood movies) as well

as reconstructions. It is important to assess the various cultural reworkings of the Fifties together; film adaptations, object trends and style revivals all feed into the production of a perception of the 1950s. Furthermore, as I have explored above, they evidently all have a relationship with ideas of authenticity. The everyday items utilised in period reconstructions have both reciprocally influenced and *been influenced by* the taste for the visual past. As identified by Raphael Samuel, the revival of the Fifties due to the trend for using the past for the present since the late 1960s has focused on visual culture, objects and the ephemera of everyday life. However, these domestic motifs arguably reflect the role of individual ordinary experience in terms of creating familiar and powerful images of desirable Fifties style. While what is remembered is often those more aspirational, weird or fun objects rather than the shabby, these objects are not 'high art' but somewhat everyday, mass-produced items such as Formica furniture, brightly coloured ceramics, or the working class Fifties-ted pompadour hairstyle adopted by Fifties revivalists. Hence, it can be seen that the Fifties revival, while no doubt more an 'idea' about the 1950s than actual historical retelling, brings out everyday objects that form a shared popular collective memory. Indeed, as Lynne Reid Banks illustrates above with her attack on *The Hour*, there are often debates and struggles about these representations so that they are read and critiqued from the position of individual memory.

As I have explored, the visual representations of the Fifties have influenced what is remembered and taken up stylistically – sometimes broad brushed historical motifs, at other times those picturesque, colourful elements associated with the American Fifties. Furthermore, authenticity in relation to revivals of the past operates in a key way through the idea of pastiche and

parody, which stems in part from media representations, as well as the objects which are selected and collected in the Fifties revival. I argue that the visual history of the 1950s, such as television and film reconstructions as well as archive footage and photography, feeds into the appetite for retro and objects from the past. The element of pastiche and parody involved in television and film representations has defined the performance of the Fifties revival in terms of what objects and things are remembered. A number of my interviewees and questionnaire respondents associated the 1950s with fun, humour and sometimes 'bad taste', in terms of accounting for their interest in the style of the period. This was not only in response to the alignment of the Fifties with happiness and nostalgia, but in terms of a kind of innate humour in the style. For instance, Mary responded:

> I love the 1950s style, it's fun, bright, feminine and sometimes cheeky and is different to how most people dress these days […] There's clearly something nostalgic about it, but I'm not quite sure why I'm drawn to it, other than the fact that it's in complete contrast with anything my very conservative parents would be drawn to, and it's fun. (q/r Mary)

Here one can see the working of hindsight and choice in terms of what is taken up and enjoyed from the 1950s. Whether or not any of it is 'authentic', Fifties styles signify a sense of fun when looked at through present hindsight, and it is evidently this position of distance that gives pleasure. There is also an acknowledgment by some respondents of the effect of taking things out of context, such as questionnaire respondent Karen who felt that '50s and 60s films are fun to watch but I think that's more from the perspective of how production and its values have changed between now and then, having worked in the television industry.' (q/r Karen). She also recognises that, for her, there is a 'feeling of joie de vivre that the era summons when viewed through the rose

coloured glasses of today.' (q/r Karen). She illustrates an awareness of the constructed nature of knowledge about the past and that the images she has of the Fifties are selective, and have been influenced broadly by mediated Technicolor representations.

As Medhurst explored in 'camp' readings of Hollywood films, there is potentially an added lightness, irony and humour in reading Fifties Hollywood glamour out of context. There is also perhaps an influence of the kind of juxtaposition of taking these items out of context and venerating icons with the hindsight that we have from present distance. An example of this is John Waters' love for Liberace, whose flamboyant style is now taken hand in hand with his homosexuality; whereas in 1959 he successfully sued the *Daily Mirror* for a strongly-worded article that made suggestive comments on his sexuality and otherwise attacked him (Johnson, 1959). Waters' approach is a kind of 'reclaiming' and celebration of an icon that was rumoured to be gay but never came out in his own time. Furthermore, another example is the fact that two cookbooks were marketed around Liberace, the first being *Liberace Cooks!* in 1970, which featured a dressed-down Liberace in checked shirt and apron, at the stove in his home kitchen. The second, *The Joy of Liberace* published in 2007, in Medhurst's terms, had camp 'written in' for a savvy audience for whom Liberace's gayness was no longer hidden – the cover featuring a high-kicking Liberace in white sequin costume on the front, with the subtitle 'retro recipes from America's kitschiest kitchen.'[52] Liberace himself has retrospectively been associated with Fifties and Sixties flamboyance, 'bad taste' and kitsch, which

[52] Indeed, the recent biopic *Behind The Candelabra* (2013) also explored the function of camp in Liberace's performance, acted out between two gay audience members: 'It's funny the crowd would like something this gay' suggests Liberace's soon-to-be lover. His companion replies 'They have no idea he's gay.'

through a process of reclaiming and taking things of context actually becomes something desirable, humourous and fun.

*Retro vs Vintage and the tensions of authenticity*

As I explored in Chapter 1, the 1970s and 1980s saw the start of an elevation of many 1950s and 1960s items to the level of valuable antiques. In a more complex way than the straightforward definition of antiques, with associations of rarity and times long gone, there is perhaps a different dynamic at play in reclaiming out of context everyday ephemera from the 1950s and the relatively recent past. Whilst not intrinsically valuable in terms of their production (many were mass-produced, such as Woolworth's Ridgway 'Homemaker' crockery), second-hand items from the 1950s and 1960s attain value through both a mainstream development of a taste for the styles of the mid-century, as well as the associations of 'knowingness' and distinction that comes from adopting and using items from the past instead of the present. As Gregson and Crewe describe, the purchasing of second-hand is frequently associated with 'work' – whether formed of skills (to repair and restore) or historical knowledge. Such a culture can raise various cheap, mass produced, or 'trashy' objects to the level of desirability, such as the 1950s-style home cocktail bar (often a flimsy, cheap, Formica construction – Ralph W, Emma, Verity and Allen all had one), mass-produced ceramics (such as Donna's cat ornament collection) or B-movie posters. Terms such as 'retro' or 'vintage' are sometimes interchangeable, sometimes used as distinctions of value. So while authenticity of items is important, there is also an interaction between old and new.

According to Gregson and Crewe, through practices of juxtaposition (as noted above variously with ‘taking things out of context’), inauthenticity here is celebrated and used as an ironic statement, ‘the practice of purchasing ‘trash’ relies not just on being able to mobilize irony, but also on the presence of other things that display that ‘trash’ is indeed being bought appropriately, ironically.’ (Gregson and Crewe, eds., 2003, p.8). The past is utilised, but only up to a point that allows a kind of an ironic comment to be made. Hence, there is an agency on the part of the buyer/wearer/collector that is not necessarily about faithful historical exploration but experimentation and, again, playing with the past. However, that is not to say that it is a purely individualistic experience – the references should not be too obscure, otherwise they fail to have the desired effect. While the use of objects from the past illustrates literacy in the collector/wearer, they must tap into other shared histories, references and nostalgias, which can be read by others.

It is useful to consider finally the tensions between authenticity and kitsch amongst collectors through the dynamics of the word ‘retro’. For Samuel, retro encompasses broadly a whole culture of ‘looking backwards’ – museums, heritage, fashion, home décor and TV reruns – taken equally as expressions of perceptions of the past and with a stake in the construction of an idea of history. However, there is certainly a conflict and contradiction inherent to the borrowing and reconstituting of earlier eras, and not just from professional historians and those who have experienced the era and want to tell the ‘true’ history of what happened. In the wider revival of the 1950s through objects and marketing there are tensions around the idea of ‘retro’ as opposed to ‘vintage’. There is a vague ‘sense of pastness’ utilised by manufacturers harnessing the appetite for

the past in retro reproductions. The way objects are designed and marketed illustrates the tensions around authenticity and past/present relationship. It might be an easy distinction to view 'retro' as the new reproduction and 'business' of selling the past and 'vintage' as an original historical artefact. Retro merely suggests a temporal looking backwards, while vintage has associations of history and aging, like cheese or fine wine. However, these distinctions are not always as clear as they seem.

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, Samuel's 'flotsam and jetsam' of everyday life that defines retrochic transforms the cast-off objects and garments of yesteryear into a quirky style for the present. Mixed in with this are brand new objects which imitate or hint at styles of the past as iconic or quirky, such as Debenhams launch of the 'Fossil' brand and their 'New American Classics' watches (1994, p.85). The Fossil watches which Samuel discusses are a useful example of authenticity as a fluid term, not necessarily in this case referring to an authentic relic, or a particular historical provenance, but harnessing the association of authenticity with positive values of historical 'weight', quality and 'classic' design. Fossil was one of the many capitalist enterprises highlighted by Samuel which profited from the desire for retro in the 1970s and 1980s, along with Past Times (p.98). Now a major brand in watches and other accessories, Fossil today describes itself as 'rooted in authenticity and a distinctive vintage-inspired design aesthetic.' (Fossil website). However, founder Tom Kartsotis' approach to business was not stuck in the past, as he went looking for an opportunity to profit from exporting products from East Asia in the 1980s:

> Tom went to Hong Kong and pondered a number of items, including stuffed animals and toys. Then he followed his brother's advice and

> settled on watches [...] Kartsotis enlisted a Hong Kong manufacturer to produce 1,500 watches, which he peddled to local department stores and boutiques. To attract more attention, he came up with the retro theme. Then, in 1989, Fossil began packaging the watches in elaborately crafted tin containers, which further played up the nostalgia angle. (Barrett, 1993, p.224)

Designed in America, cheaply manufactured in Hong Kong, this was a thoroughly modern capitalist model, and a lucrative one, cloaking cheap quartz mechanics beneath an aura of quality, history and imagination; 'capitaliz[ing] on people's desire to be different, with whimsical gimmicks like a sundial watch' (ibid.). Avoiding value-judgements and authenticity binaries, Raphael Samuel's idea of 'retrochic' refers to the wider fascination and practice of playing with the past in all its forms, implicating facsimiles, originals and frequently a collage (or bricolage) of the two. While for Samuel, both imitations and originals form his rather celebratory notion of 'retro', there is a constant conflict and tension between the idea of using styles of the past as being both distinctive and mainstream in the retro market. Indeed, Oren Meyers, in exploring how the strong collective nostalgia for certain objects of the past is tapped into by advertisers, used the example of the new 'retro styled' Volkswagen Beetle which played on associations with the 1960s combined with the desire for up-to-date, efficient technology: 'Less flower, more power.' (Meyers, 2009, p.743). There is a tension around the idea that products can become part of the 'realm of memory' (ibid.), but they are also often a part of collective cultural history.

In opposition to the negative associations of retro capitalism with 'inauthenticity' and just being about using the surface image of the past to make money, those who utilise the past stylistically frequently make sense of this through their own terms of authenticity in which a kind of historical 'weight' gives value to their practices, their sense of self and taste. However, these accounts

are often contradictory. For example, when I interviewed Allen we had an exchange which is worth quoting at length. Allen referred to some old B-movie posters he had on his lounge wall:

> A: The films of those days were absolutely dire, but the pictures of them are fantastic! The actual artwork of the advertising, fantastic. Birds with heaving bosoms and long legs and great cars! The film, if you literally watched the film, is a load of crap! But that's iconic.
> S: There's a kind of kitschy element as well isn't there...
> A: Kitsch is such a nasty word....
> S: Well a lot of people... I suppose like you say it's kind of bad, you know that film is quite bad but there's something appealing about the imagery.
> A: Yeah exactly. As you say, it's kitsch. To me the word kitsch to me sums up, I don't know why, chandeliers, little pink and gold strands on it, really *naff* kitsch. Whereas that is not naff that's great art. Yeah kitsch just reminds me of cheap 70s stuff. Late 60s, early 60s kitsch, yeah it's a good word for that. Whereas 50s stuff is not like that, 50s stuff is...retro... people call it retro, I remember when I first joined the underground we had these tests, everything we'd do, and exams and all the rest of it and we all passed. Well, a lot of us passed. And we went out to celebrate. And I turned up in a 1950s jacket, as I would do, and a pair of cuff jeans and boots and, it was an original 1950s jacket and shirt and the girls went 'ooh that's very retro'! It's not retro, it's original 1950s, stop calling me retro, I am not an add-on, or something that goes back to that date, I am that date! (Allen i/v)

While Allen can appreciated the 'bad' film posters, he feels rather affronted by the term 'kitsch'; he also illustrates the tensions and contradictions between 'good' and 'bad' taste, as well as the importance (or not) of authenticity. He also expresses an ambivalence towards the word 'retro'; while the word is preferable to kitsch he would not want to be called retro himself. The girls at his workplace did not read his *original* 1950s jacket correctly and saw him as an imitation. There is a sense that retro is a trend which can be purchased, whereas Allen's subjective, imagined past is identified here very closely with his sense of self as he says 'I am not an add on […] I am that date!' Allen's comments are partly also potentially weighted with ideas of subcultural authenticity, as his own long investment in the styles and music of rockabilly

have become an embodiment of the Fifties. The next section will examine subcultural authenticities and how this interacts and relates to an authentic sense of the past.

*(Sub)cultural authenticity and the Fifties*

Many of my interviewees express their interest in Fifties styles through concepts of authenticity. Authenticity has been implicated in the broader study of subcultures when they have been defined as a cohesive group or community; the specific 'codes' or correct behaviour/practices that relate to the boundaries of belonging, or not. According to Paul Hodkinson, 'The work associated with Birmingham University's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) was most responsible for the association of subculture with groupings based around spectacular styles' (2002, p.10). For example, Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* focused the discussion on descriptions of leisure and clothing choices, while also proposing subcultural style as a function of resistance to working-class subordination. This analysis helped contribute to the idea of subcultures as cohesive groups, of which it is always possible to be within and without. These boundaries lead Hebdige to reveal his own distinctions of authenticity between groups, such as when he compares the two teddy boy moments of the 1950s with the 1970s revival:

> The early teds had marked a new departure. [...] On the other hand, the very concept of 'revival' in the 1970s gave the teddy boys an air of legitimacy. After all, in a society which seemed to generate a bewildering number of fads and fashions, the teddy boys were a virtual institution: an authentic, albeit dubious part of the British heritage. [...] Freed from time and context, these latter-day teds could be allowed to float as innocent pretenders on the wave of 1970s nostalgia situated somewhere between the Fonz of television's *Happy Days* and a recycled Ovaltine ad. (1979, p.82)

Hence, authenticity and the Fifties seem to be written into the earliest days of subcultural work as for Hebdige, the 1970s teds did not fit his thesis of subcultures as radical collectives of resistance – the effect of their nostalgic looking-back fitted the heritage-loving mood of the 1970s and, it is implied, tapped into distorted 'myths' of the 1950s; a misguided kind of 'authenticity'.

Indeed, while the publications of Hebdige and other CCCS writers of the period such as Cohen (1972), Hall/Jefferson (1975) and Willis (1978) are still a constant referent for the field of subcultural studies, many more recent subcultural researchers have been mostly engaged in pointing out the inadequacies of the CCCS approach. Partly in response to the apparent limitations of a 'textual reading' of subcultures, the interest in the *subjective* experience of people engaged in subcultural activity has been explored through the empirical observation of subcultures, as well as researchers self-reflexivity about their own experiences. Sarah Thornton's work on dance cultures is influenced by the anthropological approach of 'participant observation', engaging in what she refers to as an 'ethnographic survey' (1995, p.107):

> Between 1988 and 1992, I acted as a participant observer at over two hundred discos, clubs and raves and attended at least thirty five gigs for comparative purposes (p.106).

She immerses herself in nights out with clubbers, takes ecstasy, humorously noting 'I'm not a personal fan of drugs – I worry about my brain cells. But they're a fact of this youth culture, so I submit myself to the experiment in the name of thorough research (thereby confirming every stereotype of the subcultural sociologist)' (p.89). Thornton's point is to question what she views as the unproductive dichotomy between 'subcultures' and 'the mainstream': 'Hebdige perceives his mainstream as bourgeois and his subcultural youth as

an artistic vanguard.' (p.94). Instead, she is concerned with the way internal distinctions of style and knowledge within subcultures reproduce some of the structures of distinction of the so-called 'mainstream' rather than being necessarily 'resistant' (p.163). What is clear from Thornton's analysis is the irresistible pull of the idea of authenticity when it comes to subcultures; she explores at length the way that a sense of authenticity operates across the fields of the recorded record as well as the space of the dance floor (p.26). Furthermore, there is a sense that Thornton's ethnographic method may get nearer the actual experience of participants in the subculture than the CCCS' textual analysis.

While Thornton is rather tight-lipped about her own experience of taking ecstasy, preferring to focus her attention on detailed observations of her companions, other subcultural writers have plumbed the subjective even more deeply by reflecting on their own experience as a starting point for informing their analysis. This echoes the cultural studies tradition of validating individual and collective experience supported by, for example, Raymond Williams who began his analysis with an assertion of what he himself had 'known' and 'seen'. As Andy Medhurst has noted, subcultural writers have often wanted to set the record straight from one's own youthful autobiography, a sense of truth in the experience that, 'I was there.' (1999, p.219). David Muggleton (2000) and Paul Hodkinson (2002) also implicate the writers own subjective experience of subcultures in their analysis but in different ways. Hodkinson begins his study of goth with a sense of belonging to a community of like-minded friends, off on a trip to the Whitby Gothic Weekend (2002, p.1). On the other hand, Muggleton's

biographical segment seems concerned with disavowing any particular 'fit' with one group:

> From late 1976 onwards, I became increasingly involved in the emerging provincial punk rock scene. [...] Yet this was never a sudden or complete transformation. It occurred gradually and sequentially. I cropped my hair in stages. I never sported safety pins through my lip, nor stopped wearing my beloved denim jacket. *Complete Control* was one of the most electrifying records I'd ever heard; yet so, too, was *Heartbreak Hotel*. (2000, pp.1-2)

He later reads *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* and is perhaps parodying Morrissey as he states, 'it had absolutely nothing to say about my life as I had once experienced it' (p.3). Muggleton's book is predicated on a sociological approach influenced by Max Weber, beginning its analysis with the interpretation of 'the subjectively held meanings, values and beliefs of the subculturalists themselves' rather than imposing theoretical frameworks upon individual experience (p.10). Part of Muggleton's project is to critique the early work of CCCS such as Hebdige's for defining subcultural meaning through structures of class and resistance (p.16). The other part of his thesis is to 'demonstrate' how far subcultures are not so much tied up with class and collective identities, but more part of a 'postmodern' state of being, what he describes as 'an individualistic, fragmented and diffuse sensibility.' (p.6). Muggleton therefore deconstructs the CCCS project of subcultures as collective class resistance and from his own 'disloyal' subcultural affiliation tests a hypothesis of subcultures as rooted first in a sense of self-expression rather than collective affiliation. For Muggleton, individual subculturalists frequently refer to "a subcultural 'Other' – against which the interviewees authenticate themselves' (p.90) and make reference to a kind of 'dressing up' as not just what it is all about:

> Dougie [an informant] [...] is happy to admit he 'doesn't wear punk rock clothes all the time'. Given that he *is* a punk – 'inside', there is no reason why he should 'have to go out and impress anybody'. (ibid.)

I am interested in exploring subcultural authenticity as it operates in relation to historical authenticity or, as I have asserted, a subjective sense of the past/authenticity. Muggleton's analysis is useful in that it values individuals' accounts of their activities in a similar way to my own work; he is also similarly attracted to the lively style cultures of the South-East of England. While Muggleton finds subcultural identifications coming from a sense of what is true or authentic to the self, this feeds into his thesis which is concerned with testing out a variety of qualities against the apparent condition of postmodernity. Muggleton's work has in turn been critiqued by Paul Hodkinson, who moves away from the 'emphasis upon fluidity and ephemerality' (2002, p.19) to bring back a sense of 'substance' to the group dynamic, albeit with diversity and individuality within (p.33). Hodkinson's work elsewhere also argues that 'rather than being predominantly characterized by movement and overlap, an elective grouping characterized by significant levels of cultural substance, I suggest, will be relatively stable and bounded in form.' (2004, p.141)

*Subcultural style and popular memory of the Fifties*

This project is not a sociological study observing the subcultural nature of a 1950s-influenced lifestyle and the debates within about its activities. As both Muggleton and Hodkinson recognise, there is a debate to be had about the definition of what 'subculture' stands for in the first place, and whether it sets up unhelpful binaries between an imagined 'mainstream' and an 'underground' culture of resistance and difference. I make a departure from other subcultural studies by considering how subcultural subjectivities both reflect and feed into a

sense of the past, at any given time. I explore those interested in the Fifties revival (some of whom may be labelled as 'subcultural' from the outside) as being a spectacular stylistic culture with certain collective recognisable qualities that might jar with other everyday styles as being 'out of time' with the contemporary milieu. In this respect I am breaking down the mainstream/subcultural boundaries, to assert that these operate equally as discursive frameworks around popular memory of the past. My point is not to catalogue or distinguish particularly between the various subcultural labels for 1950s-influenced revival cultures, variously identified as 'ted', 'hepcat', 'rockabilly' or 'rocker', but to use them as an example of a very visible, embodied way in which the past is used for the present. Indeed, while I have undertaken interviews with people engaged in a particular lifestyle/culture with a certain amount of cohesion (a shared love for Fifties styles/music/culture), I have not engaged in the kind of immersive participant observation of Sarah Thornton. While Thornton is not quite performing the kind of 'going native' practices of Tom Harrisson[53] she is a participant but also views herself as an 'outsider' (1995, p.2). Indeed, as I explored in the introduction to this project, my own fascination with mid-century history, popular culture and participation in collecting ephemera provided an insight for this project, but I also recognise my position of distance from more committed 1950s-revivalists.

I also argue that these subcultures have been highly influential in how the 1950s is reimagined through popular cultural re-presentations, layering different versions of the 1950s so that even period dramas sometimes end up

[53] Before founding Mass Observation in England in 1937, Harrisson had carried out ethnographical work on the Pacific island of Malekula, living among tribes and immersing himself in their culture. He then turned this method to his 'native culture', immersing himself in the community and undertaking a variety of manual jobs in Bolton as part of Humphrey Spender's *Worktown* project. (Highmore, 2002, p.76).

anachronistically referring to the popular culture of the 1970s when they are trying to depict the 1950s. I will return to *The Hour* for a moment to illustrate how subcultures (*influenced by* not necessarily *from* the 1950s) have helped shape representations and perceptions of the 1950s. In the final episode of series 1, a couple appear fleetingly in a small clip of an interview as a witness to a demonstration in reaction to the Suez Crisis.

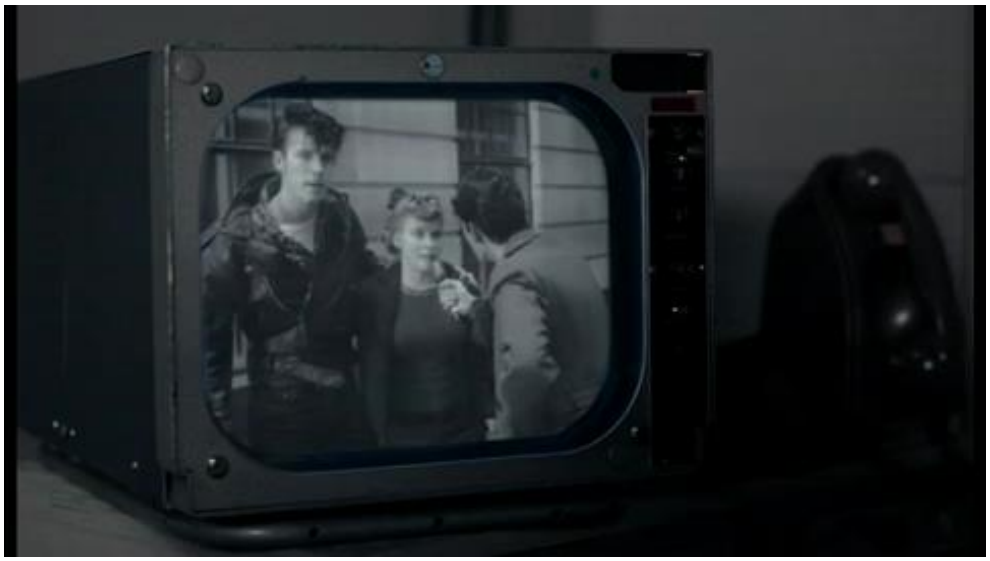

Image 13: 'Rockabilly' couple on Fifties drama *The Hour*, BBC Two, 23 August 2011.

The male character's prominent pompadour hair and biker jacket jars somewhat with the clothing of most of the other male characters which could be considered decidedly 'traditional British' – tweed jackets, woollen tank tops and heavy spectacles. Indeed, the series largely avoided representations of American youth culture in the Fifties; therefore the couple being interviewed rather clash with the other styles of the characters. They may have been referred to in the late-1950s as 'rockers' – the culture that evolved from the teds, influenced by 'the old American 'Wild Ones' theme: the black leather, the motorbikes, the metal studs.' (Cohen, 1972, p.210). While T.R Fyvel's account of Teddy boys in the early 1950s depicts the genealogy of the quiff 'with masses of hair at the back and a fuzzy shock of it above the brow' (Fyvel, 1963, p.41),

one of his informants also observes the evolution of a new culture, 'all the chief gangs now had fellows with cars and motor-bikes. The special motor-bike mob who wore black leather jackets thought of themselves as the top lot' (p.46). Indeed, the female character, with her big hair and rather masculine jacket and trousers is reminiscent of Ken Russell's teddy girl photographs from the mid-1950s depicted in Adrian Horn's account (2009, pp.150-151).

However, they are named in the end credits as 'rockabilly' and 'rockabilly girlfriend'. Indeed, while rockabilly as a music genre can be roughly dated back to the early 1950s, Craig Morrison more dates the development of the word as being used for a particular style of dress or 'gang' to the 1970s, evolving from the ted revival and the revival of rockabilly records:

> Around 1977 the market [for Fifties revival clothing] expanded from Teds and collectors to include young kids who became 'Rockabilly Rebels'. These were not casual rock fans. Bored with the musical status quo, they became volunteer urban anachronists, devotees of the sound and image of rockabilly. (Morrison, 1998, p.192)

According to Morrison, even rockabilly as a music genre 'was neither defined not consistently named in the 1950s.' (p.6). Hence, the appearance of characters labelled as 'rockabilly' in the 1950s-Britain set drama more suggests the 1950s-throwbacks of the 1970s than the known youth cultures of the late-1950s such as the teddy boys. Indeed, studies of youth culture in the 1950s chiefly identifying the main style groups of the 1950s as teddy boys, developing into the 'biker' and 'rocker' gangs in the late 1950s/early 1960s (e.g. Osgerby, 1998 and Horn, 2009). I am not using this example to criticise the 'authenticity' of the representations of the 1950s in *The Hour*, but to illustrate the influence of 1950s style revivals *since* the 1950s on popular representations of the era today. In the 2000s, the fashion of the Americanised 'rocker' or 'rockabilly', or a

mix of the two, has arguably become a more easily recognisable signifier of the Fifties than the ‘original’ 1950s teddy boys.

As popular culture combines with history in the Fifties revival, historical and subcultural authenticity interweave and contradict one another as in the example above of what more appears to be a 1970s ‘rockabilly’ anachronistically appearing in drama set in 1956. In this final section I will discuss the fact that authenticity matters for Fifties revivalists but mostly in subjective terms that are to do with the individual differentiating oneself from others in the 1950s revival community, or by what makes them feel pleasure. For example, while Ralph W does not mind wearing ‘repro’ jeans, he collects *original* rockabilly records (often at great expense) and owns an *original* 1951 pickup truck which has been updated so it runs ‘on unleaded fuel, it hasn't got the original engine in it, it’s got a 1988 Ford Thunderbird engine’ (Ralph W i/v). What these examples introduce is that even though many of these styles look like a leap back to the past, when one scratches below the surface – like checking under the bonnet of a vintage Ford – it can be seen that they are part of an historical continuum of cultural recycling since the 1950s and have resonances with the present. Authenticity is, so to speak, in the eye of the beholder; individuals involved in reviving Fifties styles have their own ideas of what ‘authenticity’ is even though they sometimes are not ‘historically accurate’. Similarly, as Dave F has expressed, adherence to history is not particularly paramount, the emphasis is on being ‘comfortable’ with what you do and ‘looking the part’. Just as Donna’s lounge decor in Chapter 1 gave her a uniqueness in the present, as well as a connection to her family history (her Nan’s coffee table), the sense of defining an ‘authentic’ self was expressed by

other interviewees. When Allen described how his flat was full of Fifties-related objects he said, 'It makes me feel comfortable.' (i/v Allen).

I would agree with David Muggleton's findings that, 'while style is, indeed, something you put on, it is also regarded as "part of you"' (2000, pp.92-93). While Muggleton attributes this to broader subcultural style, I assert how styles from the past are also accounted for in similar ways. If anything, the 'weight' of a sense of history gives them extra meaning. However where Muggleton identifies 'fragmentation, partiality and change' (p.93) in accounts of the self among subculturalists as a quality of the 'postmodern', I suggest that subjective accounts of everyday life and practices have always been subject to such fragmented, inconcrete qualities and not just of the era which theorists account for as 'the postmodern'. This links with the idea of the postmodern representation of the past in aesthetic terms more generally. Richard Voase has suggested that the past is now a 'supermarket of styles to be raided and reproduced.' (Voase, 2010, p.119). Voase explores authenticity in heritage as now transferring a sense of authenticity from the object to the subject/viewer's *response*. He suggests, 'the authenticity of an object, genuine or otherwise, is a *de rigeur* claim and has been replaced by the authenticity of the viewer's engagement with whatever is being represented.' (ibid.); this is evidence of Jameson's 'lack of historicity'. However, it can be argued that this is not necessarily a quality of the postmodern, but something which has always been the case – people have made sense of the past in relation to their subjective selves through myths, folk tales, and popular culture. It can be seen that there has always been a fluid relationship between the self, subjectivity and a sense

of the past, as I explore below in my section on evidence from Mass Observation.

As Gary Clarke observed of the subcultural work of CCCS, the focus of on aesthetic aspects of the extraordinary and 'spectacular' had contributed to unhelpful divisions between subcultures and everyday culture. Clarke called for ethnographic research, asserting that,

> If we reverse the methodological procedure adopted by the Centre and start with an analysis beginning with the social relations based around class, gender, and race (and age), rather than their stylistic products, we have to examine the whole range of options, modes of negotiation, or "magical resolution"…that are open to, and used by, working-class youth. (1990, p.83)

Taking his cue from Hebdige's distain for the 'new' teds, Clarke critiqued this view as a return to the patronising criticisms of mass culture by theorists such as Adorno. He further asserts the usefulness of an examination of the idea of 'popular memory' in terms of other style revivals' more dedicated references to the past:

> The desire to return to a mythical past as a "magical solution" is not restricted to the skinhead subculture. The "swing" and "Gatsby" revivals, for example, popular among many working-class youths in the early seventies, involved a magical return which has been hitherto ignored by academic analysts. (p.90)

Clarke also noted that subcultural theory was unhelpful in that it was mostly preoccupied with how 'authentic members' were rather than how the styles permeate broader culture (p.91). From this perspective, I utilise Clarke to temper Muggleton's rather narrow analysis of asserting subcultural identity as part of a condition of postmodernism. Clarke on the other hand rejects the notion that subcultural activity should be analysed in a particular framework removed from other practices of everyday life. Indeed, I argue that the way 1950s revival styles, while perhaps unique in terms of general style on the

street, are not only becoming more fashionable in the broader sense but that the narratives of originality and authenticity are ways of constructing an identity. Furthermore, the fact that this sense of self is given to being fragmented and inconsistent is because it is formed through the competing forces of private and social life. While undoubtedly the influence of a collective visual and digital media has made the proliferation of images and ideologies more prevalent and powerful, I would argue that the idea of unstable subjectivities has a longer history than the 'postmodernist' thesis contends.

*Mass Observation, subjectivity and memory*

As I have noted above, cultural studies, social history and anthropology have frequently valorised the stories of 'ordinary people' and their subjective experience. Since 1937 The Mass Observation Project and Archive has celebrated the chaotic, contrary and challenging nature of memory and everyday life. The project has focused on the random, subjective and disparate nature of everyday experience. It was perhaps always destined to be unique in methodology, founded by an eclectic group of individuals led by a filmmaker (Humphrey Jennings), a poet (Charles Madge) and an anthropologist (Tom Harrisson). Indeed, Ben Highmore explores the tensions between the proposed 'science' of Mass Observation and the 'surreal' in the methods and data it produces (2002). The Mass Observation project aimed to bring out accounts of everyday experience from the person on the street in a way that could challenge broad-brushed accounts by, for example, the media. However, it was also situated *within* the world of popular media and culture, and was promiscuous in its investigations on topics from everyday life routines to major national events. As Highmore states:

> Mass-Observation can be seen to be working with an understanding of everyday life that is inseparable from the mass media, while clearly not being reducible to the image it presents. As well as focusing on the 'ephemera' of everyday life, Mass-Observation sought to attend to politically important events, where the penetration of the mass media was inescapable, and where the non-fit between a representation of 'the people' and the heterogeneous actuality of people could be most vividly articulated. (2002, p.85)

Hence Highmore's definition of a 'surreal ethnography'; a 'science of ourselves' with a whimsical methodology – such as investigators sitting in pubs or department stores, meticulously noting down snatches of overheard conversations – leading to an array of disparate fragments of everyday experience. Topics to be explored included '"Behaviour at war memorials/Shouts and gestures of motorists/The aspidistra cult/Anthropology of football pools/Bathroom behaviour/Beards, armpits, eyebrows' (Harrisson, 1937, qtd. in Highmore, 2002, pp.83-84). Indeed these evocative and surreal juxtapositions in the original MO manifesto illustrate Highmore's point that 'While the use of a list might suggest a 'scientific' desire for exhaustive and rigorous investigation, the actuality of this particular list seems to be a studied attempt at being systematically unsystematic.' (p.84).

This chapter continues to configure the idea of authenticity as a subjective concept and memory and/or a sense of the past as an operator in the construction of identity and the self. Mass Observation, one of my sources for this project, has itself as an enterprise been discussed as an expression and validation of the formation of 'self' in the early 20th century. James Hinton has explored the illustration of a particular kind of fragmented 'self' to the post-war

era, but with a longer history[54] dating back to the period of 18th century enlightenment:

> Deprived of secure anchorage and ready-made systems for understanding the meaning of life, modern selfhood had, of necessity, to be constantly remade in the face of unceasing upheavals in the social order and in the understanding of man's relation to the natural world, including his own nature. In mid twentieth-century Britain, this meant grappling not only with domestic social and political change […] not only with the international context of an era of unprecedented violence; but also the working through of the revolution in self-understanding wrought by the new sciences of man—sociology, anthropology, psychology. Confronted by the ever-repeated shock of the new, the modern individual was to an unprecedented degree his or her own invention. In a world which, for an increasing number of people, appeared to offer alternative possibilities for self-invention, selfhood was not a given, but a quest. (2010, p.4)

Hinton uses wartime diaries to illustrate that individuals' sense of self is not a 'fixed state of being' but instead made through social life and made sense of through the medium of the Mass Observation diary. Rather than view these qualities as problematic, slippery and inconclusive, Hinton views the diversity and fragmentary nature of responses as a benefit: while the diaries cannot 'be used to illustrate some more general experience or theme', they reveal 'the interplay of public and private in the lives of active citizens.' (p.17). Rather than history as broad brush strokes or grand narratives, Mass Observation focuses on the details, processes and interactions of identity and memory.

In its most recent phase since 1981, Mass Observation continues the tradition of being a corrective to the grand narratives of history, offering a panel of self-nominated correspondents the opportunity to respond regularly to 'directives' – questions on a variety of topics set by the Archive or by researchers. From my own explorations in the Archive, the length of responses

[54] Claire Langhamer (2012) has also explored the articulation of an authentic 'selfhood' around heterosexual love in the 1950s.

varies depending on how much the topic being asked excites the writer, but commonly responses are lengthy and frequently explore the topic from an auto-biographical perspective. It is important to note that MO correspondence should not be viewed as raw truth or simply a window into experience – Hinton acknowledges the potential for storytelling and performance in MO writing, as his diarists were well aware they were writing for an audience and this writing as a part of their private/public construction of selves (2010, p.7). However, the constructed nature of MO writings does not take away from their usefulness, writers are afforded complete anonymity so frequently feel able to be open and honest, the writing varying in tone between formal and personal correspondence with the Archivist.[55] While not systematic in its sampling of people – anyone can write for MO and they are self-selected volunteers – MO is still useful for interrogating the *processes* by which individuals account for their use of culture and objects in their own words, as Dorothy Sheridan notes: 'statistical "representativeness" becomes less important as a factor than the capacity of the data to reveal a more in-depth understanding of social processes and social meanings.' (Sheridan, 1996, p.3). This 'unsystematic' method has historically provided insights into the processes by which people make sense of the past and the working of authenticity as a personal feeling related to experience and biography.

I use this exploration of MO to introduce it as a useful source for exploring subjective ideas of the past and as an illustration of the way people construct meaning around ideas about authenticity and the 1950s. I will utilise some examples below from a 2003 MO directive that asked people about their

[55] For more on issues of who writes for MO, representativeness, and the benefits of reading MO, see, for example, Bloome, Sheridan and Street (1993) and Pollen (2013).

memories and images of the 1950s. This was framed in connection to other questions about the 1953 Coronation of Elizabeth II as a television event (or not, as the case may be), and whether media images influenced their memories of the 1950s. Indeed, the 'directives' of the new project are far more than just a list of questions, interrogating the topic and encouraging correspondents to reflect and think critically. This is in somewhat contrast to the earlier project with its documentary influences, focused on 'recording' real-time observations and everyday routines. As such, in the balance of its questioning and the broad reach of topics explored, correspondents are encouraged to think historically and frequently frame their responses in terms of recollections and memories. The nuances of memory again should not be taken as straight 'fact' but can be seen as another process by which the past is made sense of.

The notion of experience as lending authenticity and weight to one's account is powerful in autobiographical accounts, and this continues a theme linked to subcultural authenticity discussed previously. But while oral history scholars have variously explored that while memory is a powerful counter to the grand narratives of history and the notion of a 'peoples' history' (for example, Thompson, 1978), they have also acknowledged it is itself a constructed narrative influenced not just by 'accurate', private experience (for example, Portelli, 1991). Indeed, there are reciprocal links between notions of collective storytelling and personal memory, with the two feeding into one another. Collective memory often relates to a broadly shared sense of memory, such as through the nation or group identity and has also been developed to encompass

the role of mass media on collective memory.[56] While I use 'collective memory' to signify a 'public' memory as it interacts with private, personal memory, I overall find the term 'popular memory' most useful to define the terrain where various types of collective and personal memory interact in a dynamic of tension and contestation around authenticity.

*Popular memory of the Fifties and subjective authenticity*

So what can MO responses reveal about the workings of authenticity and popular memory of the Fifties? Correspondence from the Spring 2003 directive elicited some passionate views on the authenticity of representations of the past, and vivid memories and images of the 1950s in Britain. Firstly, certain accounts illustrate that subjective positions of remembering are frequently accounted for in terms of authenticity, 'setting the record straight', or criticising false representations of history. For some, film or television representations earned scorn for their lack of 'accuracy' and 'truth' from some of those remembering the 1950s, such as N1592 (female, aged 71):

> Trivialisation on the one hand, over intensity on the other…If you are an expert on any subject whatsoever…you dread its portrayal on TV!...the ignorant viewer believes they have been shown an accurate portrayal of the facts or issues involved.

B2710 (male, aged 73) also adds,

> The 'way we think of the past' is an enormous subject, whether it means our own and family past, or whether it means public history, or the whole lot. Those of us who are well-educated and who read serious material are in a totally different situation to those who do not have this background.

There is certainly an acknowledgement of the importance of 'accuracy' and authenticity here. But the Mass Observation accounts also illustrate the

[56] For example, Lipsitz (1990), Edgerton and Rollins eds. (2003) and Neiger, Meyers and Zandberg eds. (2011).

contradictory and conflicting nature of subjective memory and autobiography, and how it can problematise a straightforward notion of authenticity. While the directive specifically referenced visual media representations of the past and asked whether these had affected correspondents' memories, even when correspondents did not think that the media had any influence on their memories, they still showed signs of using the visual as memory pointers, or of expressing their memories visually. Indeed, the issue of images of the past produces open hostility from some:

> Images are nothing, mere shadows, compared with experiences you feel on your feet and in every limb and all the senses, not just the eyes…Does anyone who thinks of the 1950s and 1960s think of them in terms of images of TV? GET A LIFE! (G1041, female, aged 77)

Still, this correspondent's ire for the image only goes so far as her own selectivity allowed, as she explains, 'The only images that mean much to me are photographs…I dote on photos and base memories on those.' This reliance on photographs for learning about the past perhaps leads to one correspondent's admittance that, 'If I'm honest, I seem to remember things in 'black and white'' (D1602, male, aged 61), and another younger correspondent stating that 'My overwhelming impression of the fifties is that they took place in black and white. Clothes were sober in colour and cars were mostly black – maroon was considered rather showy. It seems as though colour was suddenly invented in the sixties.' (M2852, male, aged 51). Thus, it can be seen that while to some correspondents there is a hierarchy of acceptable imagery for remembering the past – perhaps in this case the 'documentary' evidence of photography is considered more acceptable and somehow more meaningful than fiction – memories often are constructed and remembered through a visual 'image' (e.g. of photographs). Furthermore, many correspondents made

reference to treasured objects that spark memories, as well as popular culture icons and music. This perhaps links the subjective to the collective memory project, as Annette Kuhn proposes: 'memory is shaped by secondary revision: it is always already a text, a signifying system….memory is neither pure experience nor pure event.' (2000, p.189). Indeed, a kind of cinematic vision of the Fifties is central to Carolyn Steedman's autobiographical exploration of her own family past through very detailed and clear memories of details from a childhood dream. She dreamt of a glamorous woman, who 'wore the New Look, a coat of beige gaberdine which fell in two swaying, graceful pleats from her waist at the back…a hat tipped forward from hair swept up.' (1985, p.103). Highlighting the working of memory as a social process, in constant negotiation with the present, Steedman states:

> We rework past time to give current events meaning, and that reworking provides an understanding that the child at the time can't possess: it's only in the last few months that I've understood who the woman in the New Look coat was. (p.105)

Memories reflect our state as social beings living through time and inflected with hindsight and collective culture – it would be near impossible to live in a completely atomised state, screened and withdrawn from cultural influences on our processing of experiences.

As I noted above, younger correspondents (those who did not actually have living memory of the 1950s) also remember visually – such as the reference to 'living in black and white' – and also make specific reference to more recent period reconstructions of the 1950s in film and television as a source for their images of the 1950s. This relates to the accounts of the more subcultural expressions of the Fifties as youthful and American, such as Allen's account of rockabilly. Younger correspondents' images are frequently

'American', reflecting the transference of popular memory of the Fifties onto the more 'American-style' rockabilly fashion (such as in *The Hour* and press coverage of the Hemsby Rock 'n' Roll Weekender), the longevity of iconic objects coming out of a more affluent American culture, as well as powerful and memorable TV and film adaptations such as *Happy Days* and *Grease*, or re-runs of old TV series.[57] Continuing with the metaphor of colour, W2959 (female, aged 35) comments:

> Products that generally spring to mind are Formica and fibre glass furniture and household things. Radiograms and kitchen products. It seems like the new post-war era was going to splash colour into our lives. In television and films and in the house wives kitchens…I think my own nostalgia for the 1950s and 1960s, which is strong, comes from watching Elvis films…Perhaps it's that rich, vibrant colour that attracted me to the other films of Doris Day and Cary Grant and that polished world where family values crossed with independent women and comedy…They seemed to revel in colour in that era which must have seemed wild and exciting to our parents' generation after the war torn '40s.

Furthermore, as one correspondent suggested, 'I *like* the images I have of the 1950s, with images of family life inspired by American TV programmes' [my italics] with the wife spending her days doing 'light' housework and child care, still having time at the end of the day to prepare for her husband's return from work in order to greet him 'in a smart dress, and makeup, with his cardigan, slippers, and an aperitif before supper.' (W2950, female, aged 41).

While this representation perhaps reflects the power of the 'Fifties mystique' bemoaned by feminists, it is an example of the past being used for the present as site of imagination and pleasure. This correspondent also

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[57] Lynn Spigel has explored how young women negotiated their own knowledge about the 1950s with 'enlightenment notions' (1992, p.20) gleaned from reruns of American 1950s sitcoms and the way the 1950s are portrayed in American television. Indeed, the younger MO correspondents made reference to their images coming from watching old TV sitcoms, often American. With the proliferation of digital channels and the internet, it will be intriguing to see if this is as much of a factor on new generations when compared to that growing up in the 1980s with four main television channels which were often filled with old series' and films.

displays awareness that her images of the 1950s are a matter of 'choice', not historical 'fact'. Indeed, there is self-reflexivity at work in many of the accounts, where the younger correspondents critique and work through their constructed images of the 1950s. Despite their sometimes narrow views of the Fifties, they are able to critique their own 'mediated' views as insufficient. M2933 (female, aged 29) for instance states,

> The things I associate with the 1950s include: rock and roll, new household gadgets, including televisions, and the clothes and hairstyles. My impressions probably do stem from an Americanised portrayal. I am aware that people in the UK often link the 1950s to post-war austerity, for example, some foods were still rationed. Apart from this very limited summary, I don't really have any very clear impressions of the 1950s.

This admission and awareness of the limitations of her view are important in light of concerns about a lack of historicity in media representations of the past. M2933 illustrates that young people do not just get a sense of the past from media representations, but negotiate these in relation to other narratives (for example, 'new household gadgets' versus 'post-war austerity'). M3003 (female, aged 26) also details the other narratives that influence her 'image' of the era:

> My image of the 50s and 60s are formed from reading, films and television and a little from talking to my parents and grandparents…For the 50s I envisage women in big fancy skirts with really neat hair and also being quite thin. (Probably an image from films). I also have the silly impression that everything was in black and white!

So despite a perhaps 'mediated', Americanised Fifties with 'women in big fancy skirts with really neat hair and also being quite thin' she questions her views as 'silly'. Indeed, there is a tension revealed in these images of the past which comes through in that the glamorous 'American Fifties' as imagined seems somewhat at odds with that other more austere version of the Fifties depicted as British (such as in *The Hour*). The element of selectivity demonstrates how popular memory uses the past in the present for various contrasting meanings.

Furthermore, while she illustrates the problem of specificity in her impressions of the past, stating, 'I have to admit that I do get a bit muddled with the 60s and 70s and what happened in each decade,' she goes on to illustrate an awareness of the selectivity of media representations as she states: 'Films like *Forrest Gump*, plays like *Hair* and TV programmes like *Happy Days*, and *Bewitched* have definitely influenced my images of the period and I appreciate that what we see are either times at either end of the spectrum, with none of the mundane day to day lives being shown.'

I use the examples from Mass Observation to illustrate a close alliance between memory and images of the 1950s, whether remembering in black and white or remembering through visual and popular culture pointers. The architects of Mass Observation seemed to be trying to get to a kind of authentic experience of everyday people with their claim for a 'science of ourselves' but their project and its legacy went much further than that. Mass Observation's methods was critiqued at its inception as being a chaotic and 'unreliable source', providing a less representative picture of British society than more 'scientific' accounts in wide ranging surveys and polls.[58] As I have illustrated above, rather than focusing on the issue of representativeness (again perhaps related to efforts to get towards a scientifically measurable, 'authentic' core of experience) Mass Observation can be seen as revealing much more illuminating *processes* of the way individuals negotiate and communicate their identities in relation to social life. For this project, it illustrates the workings of authenticity in relation to images and memories of the 1950s, and how memories and images are accounted for through the pivotal notion of

[58] For more on the history of Mass Observation, see Jeffrey, 1999.

authenticity in various subjective senses. If Mass Observation reveals eccentric, fragmented and contradictory accounts, this is reflective of the quality of everyday life; as James Hinton notes, 'eccentricity […] is ordinary' (2010, p.199). These contradictory accounts illustrate the complex mechanism of memory, authenticity and a 'sense of the past', and how it operates in the realm of experience, the self, the social and the imagination.

*Conclusion*

In this chapter I have explored the way that authenticity has dynamic and potent meanings for any representation of the past whether in style revivals, memories, or history. Rather than take an approach which examines the revival of the 1950s in terms of how it 'fits' with 'more authentic' accounts, I have suggested that it is important to consider the notion of authenticity as a process; to explore how it operates in terms of subjects and audiences rather than just what is or is not authentic. Our illustrated and 'televised history' (frequently based in some ways on the history of a shared media culture) has helped create a culture of revival of aspects of fashion and objects from the 1950s. However, it is beginning to be recognised that there is a profitable discussion to be had about the interrelated nature of memory, history and visual culture, which suggests that there are not such concrete boundaries around the media as fantasy and history as representing the 'truth' of the past. For instance, as Pam Cook states, 'Critiques of nostalgia films condemn them for de-historicising the past, for creating a timeless zone outside social change and historical analysis. This implies a particular view of history and social change, as though they are themselves free from subjective emotion and the processes of

representation.' (2005, p.16).[59] Furthermore, film and television produce a fabricated history which engenders awareness and agency through playful tactics of representation, such as utilising TV history or pastiche. In the case studies of memories and images of the 1950s, as well as subcultural relations to the 1950s, there is clearly a dialogue with authenticity, but it is frequently a subjective concept related to a quest for a sense of self and identity (often related to pleasure and fun) rather than a statement about the past.

I have analysed how a more sympathetic approach to examining authenticity and representations can be explored through the idea of popular memory, which analyses the broad interaction of subjectivities, mediated representations, as well as authoritative historical narratives in tandem. While there are certainly political issues with the claiming of historical events, I have argued that representations and imitations of the past often make clear their constructed nature and thereby potentially open up debate and agency on the part of participants and audiences. In the melee of popular memory, various private and public ideological forces contribute to the formation of our sense of what the 1950s were like and what they meant but 'memory' accounts are not necessarily more 'pure', specific or 'authentic' than media narratives of the past. This chapter has focused on a sense of the 1950s in terms of the interaction between subjective imaginations, memories and shared collective representations. However, the role of subjectivity does not necessarily atomise people as individuals and destroy a sense of collective culture and recognition. The next chapter will further develop the idea of the interaction between the

[59] This also implicates gender, history and memory which I have not had the space to explore here. Not only has the demand for marginalised histories influenced a re-definition of what constitutes legitimate history (such as reclaiming the 'hidden' histories of women or working-class everyday life), but gender also inflects subjective remembrance, as explored by Stanley, 1995.

individual and more public representations of the 1950s, and explore collective identifications and statements about the 1950s in terms of heritage commemorations and public history.

## Chapter Four:
## Heritage, 'Fifties-mania' and Popular Memory

> The perceived opposition between 'education' and 'entertainment', and the unspoken and unargued-for assumption that pleasure is almost by definition mindless, ought not to go unchallenged. There is no reason to think that people are more passive when looking at old photographs or film footage, handling a museum exhibit, following a local history trail, or even buying a historical souvenir, than when reading a book. People do not simply 'consume' images in the way in which, say, they buy a bar of chocolate. As in any reading, they assimilate them as best they can to pre-existing images and narratives. The pleasures of the gaze – scopophilia as it is disparagingly called – are different in kind from those of the written word but not necessarily less taxing on historical reflection and thought. (Samuel, 1994, p.271)

> Sixty years ago, when the Queen came to the throne, Britain was a very different place. Our lives today are a world away from those we would have led back then. Transport yourself back to the 1950s by filling in details about your current life below. ('You In '52' BBC Website)

In the last chapter I explored how the popular memory of the Fifties implicates a personal, subjective sense of authenticity. Another way that authenticity plays into the perception of the past is through is the popular remembrance of the 1950s as part of the national political and cultural heritage of Britain. The idea of a collective, authentic history of the nation can have strong ideological power, creating identifications across communities and countries, smoothing over individual narratives or tensions. National heritage often involves the themes of re-enactment, myth and authenticity explored in the previous chapters. Heritage is political, contested and fought over; it can also be playful and consumerist, and this chapter analyses heritage in all these guises.

In the quotation above, Raphael Samuel was responding to the pessimism of the 'invented tradition' thesis of Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger in 1978, leading to historians becoming 'accustomed to thinking of commemoration as a cheat, something which ruling classes impose on the

subaltern classes. It is a weapon of social control, a means of generating consensus, and legitimating the *status quo* by reference to a mythologised version of the past.' (pp.16-17). Indeed, a cynical view of heritage was further expressed by writers Patrick Wright and Robert Hewison, who critiqued heritage along similar lines. Hewison suggested heritage as a deception, a stultifying view of the past which 'draws a screen between ourselves and our true past. […] Hypnotised by images of the past, we risk losing all capacity for creative change.' (Hewison, 1987, p.10).

Here, the work of heritage centres, museums, re-enactments and national allusions to the past are accused of deception and turning to myth; distorting the past frequently with the aim of shoring up elitist or political interests. Crucially, heritage is accused of not being 'history'. Rather, it becomes 'the historical': an abstracted version of the past. Here, static, visual representations of the past neutralise dialogue and debate: 'redeployed, history seems to be purged of political tension, it becomes a unifying spectacle, the settling of all disputes.' (Wright, 1985, p.69). These arguments also relate to the distrust of the historical image and reconstruction that I explored in Chapter 3. Raphael Samuel is similarly quick to defend heritage and offer another view: that historians condescending to heritage should engage in a more profitable way with the popularity of heritage and its visual, interactive, entertaining version of history. Indeed, the excerpt above from a BBC website illustrates how heritage is often used to personalise history, using new media technologies to imaginatively transport us back to the past. Heritage is hinged on the past and present relation – the past is both made intimate as well as depicted as an imaginative 'world away'.

What heritage and popular memory have in common is their insistence on the past-present relation/antagonism as central to the representation, reproduction and retelling of a past. In this way heritage fits in with the theme of the past-present tension running through the other chapters in this project and helps to illustrate the complexity of how and why knowledge about the past circulates. Very recently, in 2011 and 2012, there seemed to be a particularly visible presence of the Fifties on the national heritage scene with the 'Southbank Celebrates Festival of Britain' in 2011, and Queen Elizabeth II's Diamond Jubilee and the London Olympics in 2012. Through these national events the Fifties – both in a sense of post-war 'austerity' Britain as well as the rock n' roll 'never had it so good' 1950s-going-on-1960s – became even more visible in the shared imaginative realm of heritage. This was not just individual communities embodying aspects of a lifestyle based on the Fifties, or style magazines appealing to the cognoscenti, but an intensification of a wider visibility of references to the 1950s legitimised through commemorations, museum events and even more commodities to buy into. This chapter traces the multiple meanings and complexity of heritage, utilising the Fifties revival to illustrate that there is more agency and debate in heritage than Wright and Hewison allowed.

The first section of this chapter explores criticisms of heritage: chiefly that it represents a visual, commodified and selective version of history in order to cement ideas about the nation. Both interested in the visual and material aspects of the past, popular memory and heritage studies illustrate the tension inherent in the use of an 'aesthetic past': the visual and material remnants of the past, both 'genuine' and facsimile: old photographs, period costume on TV,

antique objects, commemorative souvenirs, retro reproductions, and so on. While the commodified past frequently represents history through mythical and appealing objects, these often interact with the idea of a public history or shared consciousness of the past which plays into the idea of heritage. Retro has made everyday ephemera of the recent past relatively accessible and desirable to own; these often mass produced objects now also find their way into museums as a form of social history, such as in the detailed reconstruction of the interior of a 1950s lounge as part of the 2011 Southbank commemorations of the 1951 Festival of Britain.

Hence, the next section explores this idea of heritage as consumerism in relation to the Fifties and suggest that the links between commodities and heritage have a strong connection to commemorations in the 1950s themselves. Since the advent of printing and reproduction technologies as well as the burgeoning visual technologies in the 1950s such as television, the past has frequently been subject to representation in playful, vague and mythical ways which is part of their appeal for an audience in terms of making history sellable and entertaining. As I illustrated in Chapter 3, the dichotomy between authenticity and a visual representation of the past can be a thorny issue; in this chapter it continues to be so for those who view commercially-orientated heritage as a manufacturer of false history. The specific context of the 1980s as the birth of heritage studies was initially critical of heritage as style over substance and history-as-consumption. While Wright and Hewison recognised the domestication of history as a feature of heritage – an interest in stately homes and the everyday processes and practices of everyday lives of the past through living museums for example – they fundamentally seemed to view

heritage as being a commercial, simplistic kind of history handed down by institutions such as the National Trust and local authorities.

In relation to this, the third section explores the tensions between the idea of heritage as, on the one hand, the history of the elite, power and nation and on the other, as stories of 'ordinary' people immersed in everyday life, domesticity and consumption. The forth section moves to the idea of heritage as a commemoration of the elite, through exploring the particular emphasis on the heritage of the 1950s during the celebrations of Queen Elizabeth II's Diamond Jubilee. This particularly patriotic event illustrated the tensions around linking the past to the present, which often seemed more to be about retro consumption than about commemorating the British monarchy. This consumption also evoked the politics of 'trash' and 'kitsch' explored in the last chapter, coalescing around a kind of ironic patriotism.

The next section debates the methods of history TV presentation and the development towards a more reality-TV, participatory and empathetic model which also illustrates Fifties heritage as a site of tension. Indeed, I suggest that Jerome De Groot's formation of 'history as leisure activity' through television and other technologies could potentially lead to the proliferation of knowledge and 'prosthetic memories' which can built collective affiliations and create a space for contemplating the space between 'then' and 'now'.

The interpretation of heritage and nostalgia as conservative has also been critiqued by Smith, Shackel and Campbell eds. (2011), drawing on Raphael Samuel's work among others to argue that that 'contrary to assumptions embedded in the 'heritage industry' critique, working class people, communities and organisations can speak for themselves.' (2011, p.3). Indeed,

Samuel explored a more positive view of heritage, highlighting its longer history than heritage studies of the 1980s had considered. Writing in the 1990s, he wrote in response to historians' growing suspicions of heritage, offering a counter-view of heritage as evolving from ordinary people, celebrating the preservationists, the hobbyists, collecting enthusiasts, small-time traders in the antiques market and 'Sunday mechanics' (1994, p.249), for example. As one of the founders of the History Workshop movement in the 1960s and 1970s, Samuel aimed to broaden the scope of history's scholarship to include popular culture and the agency of ordinary people, arguing that this enriched historical study as well as making history more accessible. In his critique of the pessimism of heritage writers such as Wright, Samuel is at pains to point out the longer (and potentially radical) history of heritage in Britain, going back to the 1930s Arts and Crafts Movement and conservation organisations such as the Woodcraft Folk and the Clarion Club (pp.296-297). He suggests that the negative response to heritage in the 1980s was a product of the context of Thatcherism, with roots in Raymond Williams' critique of pastoral nostalgia and 'sentimental and intellectualised accounts of 'Old England'' (Williams, 1973, p.10). However, not only is the vogue for Fifties styles through the mainstream and revival cultures obsessed with everyday domestic details of fashion, homes and décor, history media has also become obsessed with the 'domesticated' history of everyday life in the 1950s. Despite recent national commemorations around the 1950s, it is possible to view heritage as allowing more room for manoeuvre and debate about ordinary lives.

My final sections analyse whether heritage promotes a politics of stasis or possibilities for social change and agency for the future. I have so far related

nostalgia to a *present* state of being, a way of engaging the past for present needs. Influenced by the context of Margaret Thatcher's leadership, Patrick Wright depicted heritage as mostly conservative; heritage here denies progress, it 'preserves' and makes reference to past greatness to secure the present, but offers no sense of a future. In a sense, it could be aligned with criticisms of retro as a product of a postmodern culture which has run out of ideas, and merely uses the technologies at its disposal to sample, cut-up and re-package the relatively recent past (as in Reynolds, 2011). However, I consider how a shared heritage and history of the Fifties has been called up conversely in the service of an idea of an 'active', radical political present. As case studies to explore this, I examine the 1951 Festival of Britain and the commemoration of its 60th anniversary 2011 on the Southbank in London. Finally, I explore the 2012 London Olympics and Ken Loach's *Spirit of '45* to illustrate a very *present* use of collective memory and mythology of post-war Britain. Different contexts of remembering and representing the post-war settlement and the 1950s have meant that it has an interchangeable politics, having been called up in different ways at different times. I assert that recent years have seen Fifties heritage called up in the service of agency and inspiration for the future.

*Aesthetic heritage and the Fifties: history-as-spectacle*

This section considers the Fifties revival in relation to definitions of heritage as a transformation of history into a visual spectacle, promoting a version of history which is shared, mythical and general in theme and ideology. One of the exhilarating as well as daunting tasks when writing about a generalised 'sense of the past' is the fact that scholarly works which analyse the popularity of calling up or resurrecting the past in a popular cultural sense can

be found in myriad sources and disciplines. This chapter considers heritage and popular memory studies in the context of an academic trajectory influenced by other disciplines developing through the 1970s such as the interest in oral history and life narratives[60] and the studies of re-contextualising second-hand garments in youth cultures[61] with the 1970s observing young peoples' raiding of junk shops and rag markets. Much of this specifically related to a resurrection of the *recent* past – for example in Hebdige's alignment of the 'latter-day teds' with the stifling, static 'wave of 1970s nostalgia situated somewhere between the Fonz of television's *Happy Days* and a recycled Ovaltine ad.' (1979, p.82). Even earlier, the popularity of Fifties retro styles in particular had been brought to light in the realm of art and design with Bevis Hillier's *Austerity: Binge* (1975), while Richard Horn made direct comparison between the 1950s and the 1980s in his similarly design-focused *Fifties Style Then And Now* (1985). Add in the opportunities for the cultural revival of 1950s music with the re-release of previously unavailable rockabilly and rock 'n' roll records as well as large revival concerts such as the 1972 London Rock And Roll Show, and it is possible to suggest that the popularity for representing, reproducing and indeed, embodying Fifties styles began in earnest during the early-mid 1970s. This developed alongside scholarship and narratives that observed a growing obsession with the recent past, not necessarily in formal history, but in terms of personal, cultural and national heritage.

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[60] For example, The Oral History Society was founded in 1971 by one of the pioneers of oral history, Paul Thompson, whose *Voice of The Past* (1978) celebrates the enlightening and liberating qualities of oral testimony.

[61] For example, as I have already discussed elsewhere, the work of CCCS frequently implicated the use of second hand clothes (McRobbie, 1989) and putting together styles from various sources, past and present as with punk, mod and ted (Hebdige, 1979).

Criticism of heritage has frequently focused on its representations as an inauthentic simulation of reality and history. Samuel suggested that heritage is frequently seen as an expressive totality, a seamless web' (Samuel, 1994, p.242):

> It is conceptualized as a systemic, projecting a unified set of meanings which are imperious to challenge – what Umberto Eco calls 'hyper-reality'. In essence it is conservative, even when it takes on, or co-opts, popular themes. (p243)

Indeed, Patrick Wright uses Agnes Heller's work on the relationship of the individual and wider society to everyday life. He discusses the emergence of an 'everyday historical consciousness' (1985, p.14) coming out of a particular condition of modernity related to transformations of capitalist development in the early 20th century, as well as developments in culture, science and society which critiqued ideas of fixed realities and meanings in everyday life:

> Heller cites modernist developments in art, music and the novel which, at about the time of the First World War, severed the connections linking these forms or genres to traditional everyday modalities (styles of realism or systems of tonality) in gestures of revolt which dismissed the everyday as empty of unity or meaning – altogether without significance. The same transformations have their influence on the everyday sense of historical existence: with the changing status of everyday life, History can indeed seem to hang overhead like a whimsical power in the air. (p.17)

Similarly, science and philosophy increasingly triumphed over religion and tradition, again dismantling any kind of certainty or value in everyday life experience: '[science] cannot give meaningful sanction either to life or the social order (with its differentiation of groups and their experience of everyday life) in the same way that religion could.' (p.18). This leads to the 'dislocation, the devaluation and also the disenchantment of everyday life' (p.19). In this sense history becomes just another narrative, 'hanging in the air' without a concrete sense of reality or truth. This leads to those empty visual representations as

characterised in my last chapter in the idea of the breakdown of 'historicity'; or Richard Voase's description of the past as a 'supermarket of styles':

> Once cultural boundaries have been eroded and academic proprietorship of the past has been broken, 'the past' becomes a supermarket of styles to be sequestered, and a repository of the real to be raided. (2010, p.111)

Samuel suggests heritage scholars associate heritage with postmodernity: 'Arguably it is not the traditionalism but the modernism and more specifically the postmodernism of heritage which offends. […] It lacks authenticity. It is a simulation pretending to be the real thing.' (Samuel, 1994, p.266). Indeed, I have already explored in my last chapter how the apparently condition of postmodernity (or alternatively, modernity conceived as a longer trajectory) has been critiqued on the basis of a lack of authenticity. The development of collective visual trends and myths of the past erases 'historicity' – any kind of truthful historical reality is lost as representations can be produced and reproduced at will, by anyone.

It perhaps comes as no surprise that Samuel critiques this view as elitist, attributing it to a number of possibilities including 'a suspicion of the visual, rooted in a Puritan or Protestant distrust of graven images' (ibid.); the aesthete's condescension against the 'moronic' masses (p.267); perhaps even the historian's envy for the 'large public following' that heritage enjoys (p.270). As has become clear, Samuel is far more positive about the possibilities for visual history and heritage, celebrating the potential for imagination and fantasy rather than just 'fact'. Even the title, *Theatres of Memory*, instantly affirms memory as an inherently visual and performative act – and this idea of *agency* in its relationship with the present is crucial. Despite being written over 20 years ago, Samuel's concepts endure, particularly in the extended potential for a playful

and informal attitude to the past offered by the internet and the ever-growing popularity of social history on television or history-as-lifestyle. The 'national past' was called up in visual terms in 2012 with the event of Elizabeth II's Diamond Jubilee. References to the 1950s were made easier by the specific 'authentic' reference which could be recalled in the form of the major national event of Elizabeth's Coronation in 1953. The BBC News website dedicated itself to Jubilee events, amongst which featured a 'You In '52' interactive app which suggested:

> Sixty years ago, when the Queen came to the throne, Britain was a very different place. Our lives today are a world away from those we would have led back then. Transport yourself back to the 1950s by filling in details about your current life below. (BBC website, 'You in '52')


Image 14: BBC website, 'You in '52' (image from BBC website)

Users were invited to choose from drop-down everyday life choices from a panel entitled 'Your 2012' which would then be translated to 'My 1950s Life' – a summary of the life choices you 'may' have made based on your contemporary present. For example, picking 'rock and indie' as a 2012 music genre of choice translates to 'traditional jazz or bebop'. In this example, the Diamond Jubilee

has invited a construction of Fifties heritage that deals with history in broad brush strokes, focusing on the Fifties through popular culture and lifestyle.

According to Samuel, popular memory frequently domesticates history and focuses on objects – again related to the visual and material – the minutiae of everyday life. Wright is ambivalent about the role of 'the vernacular' and how this relates to the memorialisation of objects in heritage. While he lingers momentarily on 'the vernacular pleasures of the junk shop' (1985, p.72), he focuses more on the rare historical object and how the 'timeless' (p.78) and officially venerated survives above all else. Indeed, for Wright, the vernacular is mostly explored in depth in relation to *1984*'s depiction of 'prole' memory which is celebrated for finding meaning in the more everyday fragments, things, and individual, particular memories. However, this is lamented as a passive position with 'no active or practical possibility' (p.221); in *1984* the proles represent the remnants of something 'human', keeping hold of their stories and meanings, but they have no power to use these politically or to enact change.

Certainly, the 'You in '52' BBC app is giving users the chance to interact and play with a human, everyday kind of history, but it is a generalised history based on broad myths and also one which explicitly relates to our own present. While the app asks for the user's gender, there is no other engagement with the subtleties of the material reality of an individual living in the 1950s that might influence lifestyle outcomes such as class or race. In this way it becomes an improbable fantasy of history in which we are at once invited to imagine mostly only what cultural pleasures our imaginary past persona would engage in such as what records we would listen to, what clothes we might wear, and what we might eat.

*Heritage, consumerism and the Fifties*

While the BBC app focused on exploring the past through popular and everyday life practices such as music, employment and food, heritage institutions such as museums are also turning to more prosaic, personalised and embodied ways of exploring history which can be consumed and participated in. Brighton Museum's Diamond Jubilee event in 2012 featured live bands, retro makeovers where participants were photographed in front of a vintage scene and Coronation chicken sandwiches were on sale for £3.50.


Image 15: Sandwiches at 'Back To The Fifties Day', Brighton Museum, 2 June 2012. (photograph by the author).

Image 16: Retro makeovers at the 'Back To The Fifties' day, Brighton Museum, 2 June 2012. (photograph by the author)

The aesthetic elements were just one aspect of this event and I assisted with some reminiscence sessions in a room where we screened a film of Brighton during Coronation year from local archive Screen Archive South East. Surrounded by ephemera and issues of *Woman's Own* and *Picture Post* from the time of Elizabeth II's Coronation (brought in mostly by museum volunteers and workers), there was some conversation about what had been 'lost' in Brighton compared to those days pictured – bright, blooming, well-maintained flower beds, the Black Rock lido. Within the complex of Brighton Museum and Dome we had been placed in a rather small 'seminar' room accessed down a corridor separate to the livelier re-enactment events going on in the main café and bar area of Brighton Dome. Heritage pessimists may suggest it was 'inevitable' that we were sidelined because reflections on the complexities of history (the potential for historical reminiscences and discussions around the archive film) are not as entertaining as the material and visual pleasures of food, music and fashion.

Indeed, the power of participation and consumption was evidenced in the commercial sphere which jumped on the opportunity to package the 1950s – or a version of it – for the present around the Jubilee. The relationship of retro with capitalism is one of the central issues for those scholars who view heritage as the degradation of history: how can the truth of the past be told when it is shaped by the photogenic demands of economic interests, trends and profits? Robert Hewison observed how the 'past is a major economic enterprise' (1987, p.28) and suggested commercial interests encourage and exploit nostalgia – that is, a longing for the authenticity, craft and charm of a time before the perception of 'decline' of the 1970s and 1980s:

> The look back in nostalgia has become an economic enterprise […]. This nostalgia is in part one for a lost sense of authenticity, a nostalgia that consumes ploughman's lunches and campaigns for real ale. Commerce reinforces the longing for authenticity in order to exploit it. (p.29)

As I explored in Chapter 1, Samuel also discussed the appeal of period styles in the wider commercial realm for interiors and the popularity of 'instant oldness' in the 1970s and 1980s (1994, p.77). He specifically explores the British shop Past Times, established in 1986, which traded very much on a paradox of authentic imitations, taking care to provide 'carefully researched descriptions' with their replica items (p.87). Ironically, in arguably a strong year for national nostalgia, Past Times found itself the victim of a very modern recession, and went into administration in 2012. In April 2013, WH Smith purchased the Past Times trade name to use as a brand on goods in their stores, an illustration that the aura of history and objects from the past has a strong symbolic power, even if it perhaps can no longer sustain its own shopping outlets (Cooper, 2013).

Image 17: River Island Jubilee sundress (image from Domestic Sluttery blog)

Indeed, the Jubilee enabled the 1950s to be revived in many different nostalgically tinged products, which played with the idea of the 1950s for the present. The high street fashion chain River Island released a distinctly 1950s-style cotton sundress, complete with whimsical print illustration that called up patriotic parades of old with images of brightly coloured bunting, Union Jacks and horse-drawn Royal procession.

Hence, ‘heritage’ has been recently used strongly in relation to the 1950s, attached particularly to the event of Queen Elizabeth II’s Jubilee. While being used to sell products and ‘myths’ of the Fifties, it is clear that there is more a relation with present needs and tastes than the past. One can see this quality of heritage by looking historically, and in the 1950s themselves, commercial companies were also jumping on the bandwagon in the form of souvenirs and products which harnessed national pride in the past for the present. The 1953 Coronation was a highly visual event, being one of the first big television events exploiting this new technology. As David Kynaston states, ‘it was, undeniably, television’s day’, with at least 56% of the adult population watching at least half an hour of the service, almost double the radio audience (2009, p.299). Visual aspects of this photogenic young Queen’s Coronation were taken further and formed into a range of souvenirs; a Pathé newsreel from 1953 showed mostly women perusing a range of Coronation souvenirs in an exhibition including portraits, china, pens, tie pins, hipflasks, handbags and jewellery (*Coronation Souvenirs*, 1953). A special Coronation issue of *Woman’s Own* from 1953 featured Coronation-themed advertisements from the clothes brand Linda Leigh (‘makes the fuller figure FASHION-ABLE’) (*Woman’s Own* 1953, p.4) offering a ‘FREE booklet of Coronation styles’, while Edward Sharp & Sons ‘The Toffee Specialists’ offered a ‘delightful Coronation Souvenir tin’ (p.51). Two years earlier, in 1951, the Festival of Britain had particularly utilised notions of heritage as part of its visual celebration of Britain’s achievements and possibilities for the future. The Festival of Britain emerged from a ‘drab landscape’ (Lewis, 1978, p.11) of post-war housing shortages and rationing, as well as being constructed on ‘one of the largest bombed and

derelict sites in the centre of London' (ibid.) the South Bank in London 'was filled by a deliberate gesture of faith in a brighter future' (ibid.). The Festival itself was a heritage event, 'Officially a commemoration of the Great Exhibition of 1851, to demonstrate British achievement in arts, sciences and design…The organizer, Gerald Barry, promised 'fun, fantasy and colour' as 'a tonic to the nation'. (ibid.)

While not such a 'televisual event' as the Coronation (despite implicating the technologies of film and television in its exhibits as well as through the films made for the Festival by Mass Observation founder Humphrey Jennings[62]), Paul Rennie (2007) has explored how the Festival is largely remembered through its colourful souvenirs.[63] His book celebrates the visual remnants and relics of the event through souvenirs that were produced for the Festival of Britain in form of handkerchiefs, coins, decanters, brooches, neck scarves, and more. Furthermore, the Festival programme was filled with advertisements, many from companies calling up themes of the Festival in visual terms bringing together the present with past glories, from the Great Exhibition of 1851 onwards. For example, Siemens declared 'PRESTIGE from the past, PRIDE in the present, FAITH in the future' describing how, 'In 1851 (the year of the Great Exhibition in Hyde Park) the late Sir William Siemens had already started to lay the foundations of the great enterprise which was to bear his name' (Cox, 1951, plii). While Fifties enthusiasts in the 21st century associate their style with

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[62] Jennings produced the documentary *Family Portrait* for the Festival of Britain which celebrated 'the evolution and character of British modernity through the theme of progress in the realms of science and technology.' (Logan, 2011, p.321)

[63] Indeed, Harriet Atkinson has suggested that the Festival of Britain was one of the last examples of the exhibition as a means of communicating ideas 'through image and word': 'By the end of the 1950s, the majority of British people would have access to a television and this, alongside radio, would become the ubiquitous medium for mass communication in Britain. Exhibition as a means for communicating public information was soon to become outmoded.' (2012, pp.194-195).

authenticity and quality (for example, the value placed on the craftsmanship of selvedge jeans or the idea of homemade), in 1951 the department store Liberty referred to the quality of its own past: 'To-day as in the '80s, it is the favourite haunt of visitors from every land. For the tradition of hand-craftsmanship, of carefully chosen colours and fine design lives on there.' (plvii). The '80s' referred to here were, of course, the 1880s – an imagined past harnessed to conjure up ideas of heritage, quality and authenticity. Furthermore, the Standard Motor Co. aligned their very modern cars with a 'timeless' image of the meeting of progress and 'democracy' with an image of a royal horse and carriage procession for State opening of Parliament next to a separate image of a shiny new car:

> truly a Royal occasion with its colour and its pageantry…yet symbolising the very essence of our British Democracy…all that's best of the Past joining with, and giving authority to, the needs of the Present… an occasion as typical of our way of life as the craftsmanship that goes into the products of the Standard Motor Company. (pxxi)

Here was the past and present coupled together in imagery and words which created a sense of a universal British nation in 1951 focused on the traditions of pageantry and pride as well as the innovations of democracy and technology. This illustrates the point that it is possible to trace the way that heritage is used to sell commodities using historical myths further back than the 1970s and 1980s, finding evidence of this relationship in the 1950s themselves. The fact that these mythical 'manipulations' of history were going on in the 1950s which is so often looked back on as a simpler time or as an 'authentic Britain' is an intriguing paradox. While commercial, visual uses of heritage can be viewed as a distortion of history for profit, it is actually less about history and more about appealing to present tastes and desires. During the Festival of Britain in

1951, as at the Queen's Coronation in 1953 and the Queen's Diamond Jubilee in 2012, a visual, material sense of the past is used to cement an idea of the nation for *present* needs. However, this can be expressed in different political shades, as I explore at the end of this chapter.

*Heritage: history from above or below?*

I have suggested above that 'heritage' as representing a visual, mythical, 'national' and broad brushed history is not limited to the late 20th century. Raphael Samuel relates heritage criticism to the context of the 1970s, as a seeming backlash against 'the triumph of aristocratic and reactionary nostalgia over the levelling tendencies of the welfare state' or 'an aristocratic plot hatched, it seems, by the beleaguered owners of country houses in 1975' (1994, p.242). However, heritage can also be deployed for a different politics, depending on the context. Samuel has suggested 'heritage' in terms of popular history, visual culture, and memorialising has a longer trajectory:

> Railway antiquarianism is almost as old as the railways themselves […], in the 1930s it was thoroughly familiar to readers of the Daily Herald and the Shell Guides, quite apart from the railway modellers running replicas of Puffing Billy […], while the gypsy arts – or folk arts as they were called at the time of the Festival of Britain – have had their admirers among the expensively educated ever since, in the 1860s, Francis Groome ran off with his Esmerelda and went off to live with the gypsies on Headington Hill. (1994, p.244)

However, the particular association of heritage as a malicious retreat into nostalgia, 'a sickness that has reached fever point' (Hewison, 1987, p.10) coalesced in the 1970s around the growth of heritage centres, large institutions such as the National Trust, and the politics of Thatcherism of the 1980s. This was also the era in which the 1950s in particular began to be remembered and re-enacted in the context of a mythical time within popular culture. The context of Margaret Thatcher's 1979 election win is central to the arguments of Hewison

and Wright, not only in terms of discussing how heritage is a response to a climate of decline in Britain since the Second World War, but also how it is used to shore up the political and social elite.[64] Hewison and Wright's vision is of heritage as a kind hierarchy – at best, a tunnel vision of history as stately preservation and nostalgic yearnings for the simplicities of days gone by; at worst, control and manipulation of the masses. This section questions Fifties heritage in terms of this hierarchy and asks whether it is a static, conservative version of the past or if it is an expression of a more everyday ordinary past, allowing for individual agency and creativity.

Robert Hewison focused his analysis of heritage as elite and authoritarian, distracting from the failures in the present and preserving the assets of the wealthy. He argued that the burgeoning industry of living museums and historical tourist sites as an economic enterprise and simplified history-as-entertainment meant: 'the past has been summoned to rescue the present' (1987, p.21). He focused on the development of heritage as a non-progressive response in a culture of decline, related to a sense of destruction and lost space in Britain coming out of the Second World War (p.35). This sense of decline was followed by failures of post-war planning and the erosion of some traditional forms of life by speedy modernisation in the immediate post-war years (ibid.). Nostalgic yearnings for a return to the idiosyncrasies of former ways of life is conceived as a response not only to change, but also to the particular style of change: 'The effect of modernisation was not just that

[64] Indeed, Thatcher herself has become mythologised particularly since her death in 2013, both in terms of her rise to power from a 'grocer's daughter' to Prime Minister, as well as her political legacy. Writing in the *Guardian*, journalist William Keegan took the opportunity to write a corrective for those who seemed to 'prefer […] the legend to the facts' (Keegan, 2013). Still, Oscar Quine observed, 'National mourning is a funny thing; often the nation isn't that involved' (Quine, 2013), noting the 'passionate' response on social media which revealed both public indifference as well as celebration of Thatcher's death.

everything had changed, but that everything had become more and more the same, as architectural and scenic differences were ironed out under the weight of mediocrity and uniformity.' (p.39).

Combined with this, according to Hewison there was also 'the steady de-industrialisation of Britain which has done so much to create the climate of decline' (p.89). Real working life became 'fake' heritage and industries were transformed into ironic exhibits in museums: 'While the real world of industrial manufacturing decays, redundant and obsolete machinery flourishes – in museums such as Ironbridge Gorge and Beamish Open Air Museum (pp.91 – 93). Furthermore, both Hewison and Wright focus on the benefits of heritage to the wealthy, Hewison focusing on the National Trust's preservation and promotion of stately homes and the popularity of 'country house' style:

> Part of the magic of the country house is that the privilege of private ownership has become a question of national prestige. Those who have held on to their houses, and the majority of all country houses remain in private hands, have had to concede a greater degree of public access in exchange for tax exemptions and repair grants […], but the hierarchy of cultural values that created the country houses remains the same. (1987, p.72).

From this view, not only does heritage appear to smooth out the reasons for transitions and change – masking the problems of modernisation and the decline of industry in nostalgic reconstructions – but it also frequently assists in a support of the elite.

In a similarly pessimistic tone, Patrick Wright explored Margaret Thatcher's particular use of references to the past to justify her position and policies. According to Wright, her 1983 election campaign utilised the ''perennial values of the Victorian era' – thrift, love of country, neighbourliness, hard work and charity' (1985, p.168) as well as articulating conservative values

against ‘against post-war statist reform’ (p.186). Roger Bromley took this even further to suggest that the specific relationship between the past and present in popular memory leaves it open to manipulation: ‘the images which shape our memory of the past define its ‘reality’, the issue of who decides what is remembered is crucial.’ (1988, p.2). Bromley used Thatcher as an example of this lethal combination of power and popular memory, where images of the interwar period and the Second World War were associated with ‘a particular moral rhetoric, an explicit nostalgia for ‘eternal values’, and common sense ideas about a national past’ (1988, pxiii). Thatcher famously set up the 1960s as the root of recession, unemployment and civil disobedience in the latter 20th century: ‘We are reaping…what was sown in the sixties…fashionable theories and permissive claptrap set the scene for a society in which old values of discipline and restraint were denigrated.’ (qtd. in Marwick, 1999, p.4). Wright adds to the despair by quoting George Orwell’s warning in *1984*, ‘Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past.’ (qtd. in Wright, 1985, p.215).

Both Bromley and Wright examine the way Thatcher justified the Falkland’s War through vague references to the past, in order to suggest Britain’s unchanged, eternal and present ‘greatness’. Bromley cites a speech from 1982:

> The people who thought we could no longer do the great things which we once did. Those who believed that our decline was irreversible – that we could never again be what we were…that Britain was no longer the nation that had built an Empire and ruled a quarter of the world. Well, they were wrong. The lesson of the Falklands is that Britain has not changed and that this nation still has those sterling qualities which shine through our history.
> (Margaret Thatcher qtd. in Bromley, 1988, p.151)

More recently, Lucy Noakes has explored how 'War is a time when ideas of national identity are extremely important; as many people as possible have to feel that they can identify with national war aims, and national values, if a war effort is to be successful.' (2009, p.21). She also analyses how, in the context of the Falklands war, Thatcher made reference to the Second World War in order to 'present the 'new right' as continuing to uphold the old traditions of the British nation; traditions which, it appeared, had been forgotten in the post-war years of consensus politics' (p.105). While Thatcher did not depict herself as a fan of the 1950s, she used simplistic ideas of popular memory and heritage in her rhetoric that defined heritage criticism. Her use of the past helped to create the idea of heritage as a pacifying vision of past glories, distracting the masses from national decline. Indeed, this relates to heritage scholars' assertion that heritage is *not* history. As Wright defines it, 'National Heritage involves the extraction of history – of the idea of historical significance and potential – from a denigrated everyday life and its restaging or display in certain sanctioned sites, events, images and conceptions.' (p.69). Heritage smoothes over the cracks and unites communities under a tunnel-visioned national past instead of illustrating the complexities of history and promoting true understanding. Is it possible to say the same in relation to Fifties heritage?

It could be said that the recent 1950s-themed commemorations exhibited a sense of 'invented traditions' specific to a picture of Britain in the Fifties as happy, harmonious and patriotic. The 1950s-themed celebrations for Elizabeth II's Jubilee were a picturesque way of cementing the nation's patriotism by making the monarchy accessible and fun. By choosing 'Fifties Britain' as a style of memorialising this national event, it was almost as if the 1950s were

automatically associated with a traditional, patriotic, authentic Britain – street parties, a sense of fair play, tradition, tea and cake, Union Jacks and bunting. It was not just Brighton Museum who focused on the 1950s, large and small events across the country 'looked back' to the decade of Elizabeth's Coronation, explicitly associating Britishness with the 1950s such as Hampton Court Palace's '1950s British garden party' (For mums website, 2012) and the Sandbanks Hotel's '1950s Great British Jubilee Party' ('Sandbanks Hotel to host Great British Jubilee Party', 2012).[65] I have already explored in some of the conflicted responses from my interviewees how they frequently view the 1950s as a 'simpler' time, such as Allen and Verity, who associated the era with community and caring family values. Perhaps the national commemoration of the 1950s is supporting a restorative nostalgia – the idea of a 'return' to a mythical, simplistic Fifties (perhaps related to Whyman's concept of 'cupcake fascism' in Chapter 2) before the challenges of technology, sexual revolution, recession, unemployment, and the complications of multi-cultural society. Allen in particular described a sense of dissatisfaction with life in Britain today:

> We want to move to America […]. You know, the last one out of this country turn the lights off! It won't be me 'cause I'll be gone way before then. I know so many people that want to get out of this country. This country has gone to complete pot. […] It's not been optimistic... it's not the last few years or the last year or so where it's been economic strife etc, it's been a long long time coming. (Allen i/v)

This could be seen as an expression of nostalgic yearning in the face of a dissatisfactory present, a disengagement from present social and material conditions. However, as I have already analysed, there are tensions in Allen's views between present and past Britain, and present and past America.

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[65] Some other examples include the market town of Brigg in North Lincolnshire celebrating with a '1950s Queens Jubilee Disco' ('Your guide to Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebrations across North Lincolnshire', 2012) and Ryde's Appley Park with a range of 'vintage events' including 'a pop-up high street straight from the Coronation year of 1953' (Pearce, 2012).

Despite stating 'Whether it be Britain or America things were better back then', he also suggests '1950s in Britain was probably the most depressing time! There was still rationing, mass unemployment, there were teddy boys who were going back to Edwardian times, they were going back even further in their dress sense. It was just manic depressives basically! Whereas America at the same time, everything was looking *forward*.' (Allen i/v). It is an imaginary Fifties America which is Allen's nostalgic fantasy, and a fantasy that he is going to make real in the present with his notion to emigrate.

The idea of Fifties Britain as having a particular national identity and set of social values is also reflected in Mass Observation correspondence. However, this is again reflected on from a position of present hindsight so that rather than affirming a simple version of past events, it suggests the tension within memory between past and present. For example, B2154 (female, aged 70) suggested:

> My memories of the 1950s are of sunshine and a slower pace of life, and of butter rationing…Cricket and the Royal Family had a much higher profile then. There was much more politeness shown and one did not hear of muggings. There were fewer cars, so life in London seemed more spacious somehow. One felt quite safe walking along late evening round the West End and small back streets…The only things I feel nostalgic about are the respect and behaviour of that time. There seemed to be more thought for others, I don't remember there being threatening youths about.

Like Allen's constant weighing up of the Fifties between Britain and America, the correspondent's account is narrated through statements that continually oscillate between measuring the past as 'more' or 'less' preferable or better than the present. This suggests Annette Kuhn's notion of the structure of memory texts: 'In memory texts, time rarely comes across as fully continuous or sequential…The memory text is typically a montage of vignettes, anecdotes,

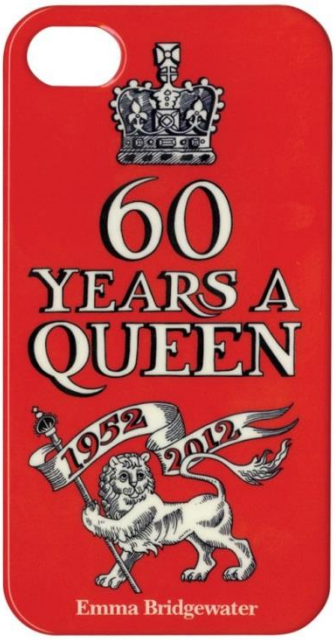
fragments, ‘snapshots’, flashes.’ (2000, pp.189-90). What is remembered or forgotten shifts between a fairly non-specific ‘past’ and present time, and through the filter of the individual’s present consciousness and politics. What we see in Allen’s imaginary Fifties and the Mass Observation correspondent’s memories is the 1950s/Fifties as a discourse for talking about the present; not actually replacing or completely disengaging from the present.

*Fifties retromania and the Diamond Jubilee*

In a similar way, recent revivals of the 1950s for the purposes of heritage can be seen as part historical reference, partly as a way of making history relevant for the present through popular ‘retro’ styles. This section explores how heritage of the 1950s has been used in relation to the idea of Britain as a ‘nation’ in terms of celebrating the state as well as shared values and traditions. In the case of Queen Elizabeth’s Diamond Jubilee in 2011, the emphasis on the 1950s allowed people to enjoy a national heritage event through a focus on vaguely 1950s-oriented leisure practices such as picnics, parties and going to a jive dance. Even the 1950s day at Brighton Museum made little specific reference to the Queen herself, focusing more on popular memory of shared collective culture. The event ended up inviting more common recollections of bygone Brighton and the more general sensory pleasures of dressing up in 1950s garb, dancing to 1950s music, and eating 1950s food. This event did not seem to specifically strengthen patriotism in the present but instead offered a vague sense of belonging through consumption of a mythical past. Furthermore, it is necessary to take into account the possibilities for individual agency and the scope for struggle and debate in heritage representations. What pessimism about heritage misses out is a growing feature of heritage and

representations of the past which is the focus on the everyday, domestic items of the past, as well as ordinary lives. Through these representative practices it is possible to counter the idea of a static, oppressive idea of a national heritage, which I will illustrate using examples from the 1950s revival.

David Lowenthal has defined heritage in terms of making history familiar and *present*: 'Viewed as history, the past is a foreign country; viewed as heritage, it is highly familiar.' (1998, p.139). He goes on to describe the practice of this: 'One way of likening past to present is to play down grand historical events and focus on ongoing usages of everyday life.' (p.140). Hence, heritage makes itself present by making history tangible through material and symbolic modes. Indeed, history is domesticated in a dual sense – both through the everyday items and routines it celebrates, but also the way in which it brings history and the nation closer to the domestic, intimate realm. In relation to the Diamond Jubilee, the past has been harnessed by products which offer pleasure in representations of a shared culture which can be bought and taken into the home. In the tradition of the Coronation event of 1953, big brands traded on the Jubilee with a range of products themed around Britishness and the 1950s. Along with Cath Kidston, Emma Bridgewater was another designer whose twee ceramic illustrations seemed to fit the 2012-British-1950s-mania moment. Her designs for 2012 with its strong mottos of 'Steadfast and True', '60 Years A Queen', 'London 2012' appear in font styles and designs seemingly influenced by the graphical representations of mid-century artists. The designer created a centenary mug for the Chelsea Flower Show in a design which was suggested 'harks back to the mid-century style of Ravilious [Eric] and Bawden [Edward]' (Emma Bridgewater website) – indeed, Eric Ravilious himself




designed commemorative mugs for both the Festival of Britain and the Coronation. Bridgewater is not 'high art' – she made heritage intimate, bringing a vague sense of British heritage into the home on cosy items such as mugs, aprons, egg cups and biscuit tins. It was even possible, in an intriguing mix of modernity and tradition to add a touch of retro patriotism to a mobile phone with her iPhone cover.

Image 18: Emma Bridgewater Jubilee iPhone cover. (image from Emma Bridgewater website)

Product endorsement for the Queen's Diamond Jubilee spread to even more prosaic domestic items, from specific references to royalty on Palmolive's special edition Rose and Damask liquid hand soap emblazoned with a 'Queen's Diamond Jubilee' logo to classic British product Marmite having a laugh with their 'Ma'amite' special edition packaging. Kellogg's cereals ran special edition 'retro' packaging while Heinz Baked Beans celebrated the Diamond Jubilee by resurrecting label designs from 1952.


Image 19: Ma'amite. (photograph by the author)


Image 20: Heinz retro-style baked beans. (photograph by the author)

On the topic of the new-but-old Heinz cans, it was reported in *Design Week* that, 'Katherine Broadley, senior brand manager at Heinz, says the new cans will 'honour our British heritage as well as provide retailers with an opportunity to capitalise on sales in time for the big celebration' (Montgomery, 2012). It would not be extrapolating too far to suggest that the other brands repackaging their goods in 2012 had the same idea – it is not a reflection of history but using the past as novelty to sell more products in the present. As I have previously illustrated in my discussion of the Queen's Coronation and the Festival of Britain, the notion of profit-making in the present from nostalgic style and imaginary tradition is not new.

Along with household products, the Fifties revival has further seeped into the intimate and domestic realm in terms of nostalgic representations in food. This is significant not only because it demonstrates the spread of 'retro' into various areas of ordinary everyday life, but also because it illustrates the tensions between past and present in terms of representations in Fifties heritage. Marks and Spencer traded on a nostalgic past with a special range of

sandwiches for Summer 2012, including Coronation Chicken, the 'recipe of the day' for the Queen's Coronation in 1953 (Kynaston 2009, p.200). Paradoxically, the Marks and Spencer version was also voted the 'best new sandwich' in 2012 by the British Sandwich Association. Marks and Spencer also came up with other retro sandwich combinations such as 'Roast Beef and Yorkshire Pudding', conjuring up images of the 'traditional' British Sunday roast, and 'Pork Pie, Egg and Salad Cream', referencing snacks ideal for a street party, as well as Britain's austerity – and rather 'working-class' – favourite Salad Cream.[66]


Image 21: Marks and Spencer Jubilee sandwiches. (photography by the author)

While the roast beef and pork pie sandwiches referenced the festivities of Elizabeth II's Coronation in their 'traditional' ingredients and packaging complete with Union Jack bunting print, the actual combination was critiqued by some as an abomination of taste. Samuel Muston lamented 'Usually you're the best of the supermarkets, so good and decent […] Sandwiches and pies are

[66] According to food writer Felicity Cloake, Heinz came close to scrapping Salad Cream in 1999 but for a public outcry which asserted Salad Cream as 'uniquely British'. Indeed, while the concoction was invented in 1845 but really became popular from the Second World War when it was became a more economical substitute for the egg-heavy mayonnaise and a key ingredient in many austerity dishes (Cloake, 2010).

clean different things, we all know that. It's part of the Jubilee range, too, and I for one can't ever recall seeing HM chowing down on Melton Mowbray's finest.' (Muston, 2012). It was also a calorific extravaganza, the Pork Pie sandwich weighing in at an impressive 680 calories (Hayward, 2012). Arguably, the bread of choice of 1953 would have surely been *Mother's Pride*, the plastic wrapped 'foamy white, feather-light slivers' of which were an antidote to rationing's coarse 'National Loaf' (Hardyment, 1995, p.38). Instead, the packaging of Marks and Spencer's carbohydrate-heavy creations boasted their speciality 'onion bread' and '9 grain bread'. In summary, while harnessing elements of the past, the sandwich is actually resolutely situated in the present, a calorific concoction designed for a greedy 21st century appetite and middle-class, 'foodie' culture with a sense for irony. In similar fashion, the Jubilee Garden Party at Hampton Court boasted, 'Our catering partners, Ampersand, will be on hand throughout the day to provide retro picnic boxes filled with 1950s inspired delights, whilst ice cream and cappuccino carts, a delicious candy floss stall and a succulent hog roast will add to the perfect street party atmosphere.' (For Mums website, 2012). This bizarre combination of anachronistic food elements appeals to the past as well as appealing to the idea of consumer choice (as well as perhaps modern-day gluttony).

On the subject of consumer choice and taste, again class becomes a key factor in heritage in amongst arguments about the appropriateness of the lowly pork pie and salad cream in commemorations for royalty or the reimagining of a 1950s picnic to include the luxury of bespoke picnic hampers and hog roasts. Evidence of the interaction between past and present in heritage, these food representations are also employing a nostalgic but somewhat 'knowing' irony in

the use of simple, traditional foods perhaps associated more with working-class culture.[67] While Wright and Hewison objected to the focus on institutions and country houses, even within the veneration and re-presentation of a more vernacular heritage class distinctions have a part to play. A broadsheet food journalist dismissing the pork pie sandwich as a culinary abomination is just one of the ways that Fifties heritage illustrates tensions of class and taste. I explored in my last chapter the role of distinctions in the second-hand market, how the flea markets of yesteryear have lost their associations of poverty, while vintage and antique markets can be seen as a site of distinction where the mostly middle-classes rummage, using their knowledge and taste to seek out just the right object. It is possible to see Fifties heritage in terms of the valorisation of everyday items – even those 'tacky' items like ice buckets, cocktail bars, gaudy ceramics – as an ironic representation purchased by an audience of those-in-the-know. Indeed, the attendance at museums and the 'appreciation' of heritage implicates many different politics of distinction, from appreciating the provenance of a particular historical artefact, to enjoying the fantasy and amusement of living museums, or purchasing heritage-themed items from the gift shop.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has analysed the politics of heritage through developments in museum display, asserting the past-present relation as she suggests heritage as 'a new mode of cultural production in the present that has recourse to the past', producing something new for the present from

[67] Another example of this perhaps is the revival of real ale and the dimpled pint glass which the BBC reported carries an 'old-school coolness' (Barford and Rohrer, 2014). Revealing perhaps a 'kitschy' tension with fashionable younger people embracing the traditional culture of old men in pubs, a landlady in Dalston, East London commented: 'It's not old men with flat caps and whippets drinking out of dimple glasses […] Now you've got hipsters, girls in skinny jeans and fashionable Ts, drinking craft beer. There's an appropriation of the traditional by the hipster culture.' (ibid.)

the obsolete (1998, p.149). This is through a process of exhibition, display and performance that adds value to the forgotten object (p.151). She also notes the developing informality of museum display, from 'the quiet contemplation of objects in a cathedral of culture' to the demand for a more informal, engaging 'experience' (p.139) related to tourism. Indeed, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett suggests that it is possible to relate museum practices to the domestic and intimate constructions of the everyday life world. Acknowledging that, 'In the museum of the life world, everyone is a curator of sorts' (p.259), she specifically focuses her discussion on kitsch in order to explore the tensions within 'vernacular practices of connoisseurship' in everyday life guided by good or bad taste (ibid.). She recognises the associations that objects can give to the bearer through good and bad taste: 'What was once discarded may recover its value […] in everyday life, which is not only where the process of converting life into heritage begins but where an ongoing process of distinction makes and remakes social hierarchy.' (p.260). Indeed, she notes the transformation that happens when taking something out of context: 'What some fads lacked in exclusivity during their first life they gain the next time round through the recoding operations that consumers […] produce.' (p.275). Kirshenblatt-Gimblett illustrates the possibility for vernacular items of heritage to be taken into the intimate life world, so that it is not necessarily those 'hallowed' objects and monuments that constitute heritage. Even those ordinary, forgotten items that may even be defined as 'trash' or 'kitsch' when recontextualised can come to represent a particular historical era – such as the particular role of kitsch in the image of the Fifties revival.

I have already explored in my last chapter how kitsch in the 1970s was a mode of ironic display and much of this began with a rediscovery of items from the then recent past, the 1950s. Kitsch has become a practice of distinction and a *process* of reception in the viewer or purchaser, played out in the Fifties revival through a kind of ironic patriotism. Leslie Gillilan's guide for kitsch aficionados reflect the acceptance of 'bad taste' as good style, and singled out 1950s patriotic souvenirs in particular as desirable in terms of 'Post-war classics: Festival of Britain zigzag wireware (with knobs on), and a 1953 Coronation portrait of Her Majesty.' (Gillilan, 2003, p.23). The issue of distinction comes up again not just in terms of 'antiques' but in designers being influenced by past styles in designs which harness national pride and heritage.

This often ironic consumption of patriotism is built into certain retro reproduction commodities, with companies trading on a ready-made irony and using old fashioned or 'out of date' imagery. Apart from the Jubilee, another call to patriotism in 2012 was the London Olympic Games, and while not an official brand of the games, Cath Kidston harnessed patriotic sporting imagery in some designs for 2012. Her design range called up a vague sense of innocence, patriotism and British 'fair play' with her whimsical 'Be A Good Sport' designs on ceramics, bags, tea towels and other items. Kidston is now a major international brand from a relatively simple idea of plundering textile prints from the past. She is now so ubiquitous that one woman's sense of 'feeling special' using her products had now been obliterated, lamenting: 'She is everywhere now - and there's nothing more annoying than finding your hidden gem is suddenly a cheap bit of costume jewellery available on every High Street.' (Porter, 2009). Not only does this illustrate the way commercial culture

harnesses heritage for present purposes but illustrates the distinctions inherent in purchasing heritage and 'retro'. By seeming to recontextualise a heritage-influenced style one is making an expression of literacy in irony, as well as uniqueness – it is not the same when everyone 'gets it' or it is 'everywhere'.

*History television and Fifties heritage*

Television is another medium where national heritage and identity is played out via objects and the visual representation of ideas and myths about Britishness. Roger Bromley echoes those such as Foucault who have accused media representations of 'reprogramming' popular memory (as discussed in Chapter 3) as he makes a link between how 'narrative fictions, autobiographical writings, and television productions' contribute to the 'social production of memory.' (1988, pxiv). He argues that popular memory is distorted by the hierarchy of certain ''preferred' forms' and ''preferred' memories' (p.4). He asserts that visual representations exercise a dominant power over other narratives of the past, and that these 'preferred memories, whereby the past becomes an event to be pictured, styled, and filmed, have a stabilizing and conciliating function.' (ibid.). The past is neutralised of struggle and conflict through becoming a mere 'objet d'art' (p.10) and 'The injuries of class, war, race and gender are anaesthetized by the 'tokenism' of specific cultural imagery.' (ibid.). However, it can be seen that developments in the style of history programming has potentially opened up some space for informal histories, as well as influencing the consumption of history through heritage.

Indeed, the 2012 series *The House The 50s Built* reconstructed a 1950s house with all the 'latest' technology coming out at the time; each episode was focused on a different room of the house. Broadcast in June 2012, the same

month as the Jubilee, it illustrated the idea of the 1950s as a watershed of progress and innovation, focusing on 'ingenuity and life-changing technology behind the 1950s inventions that launched drab, black-and-white post-war Britain into a Technicolor-drenched world of the future.' (Channel 4 website). The programme's focus could in some ways be seen as creating the kind of 'unity' critiqued by Bromley, as its focus on technological innovation created a kind of conception of history as a series of universal watershed moments. Resembling one of the hyper-real reconstructions at the Vintage at Goodwood Festival,[68] the first episode featured a shiny Formica kitchen, complete with toaster, refrigerator and Kenwood Chef.[69] One viewer criticised the historical authenticity of the programme in class terms on the Channel 4 website: 'The general public did not have access to any of this until the 60s. That's what you get when you have upper middle classes making programmes about their life in the 50s and lulled into thinking that everybody else shared their life style which of course the vast majority didn't. The reality for them was a larder, copper boiler, mangle and distemper with zero electrical appliances.' (ibid.). Indeed, this illustrates a class tension in terms of the heritage and authenticity debate: there is a sense of challenging the status quo of elite history and suggesting that the true history of the 'general public' is that of the working-class.

Bromley's analysis is thought-provoking in light of the above example which arguably tries to unify experience through a visual expression of a shared heritage and history. However, his view only goes so far in suggesting how complex the use of the past in popular culture and political rhetoric is. When

[68] Retro fan fashion designer Wayne Hemingway, the architect of the Vintage Festival brand, was interviewed as an expert on the programme.
[69] Capitalising on the popularity of vintage domestic style, in 2013 Kenwood released their 'Kenwood Chef Classic KM535'; a version of their popular food mixer with retro styling and detailing in 'popular colours reminiscent of the 1950s and 60s' (Kenwood World website).

heritage becomes domestic and accessible, people can compare their own experiences against it, and critique representations. Bromley's focus on the power relationship of narratives in popular memory is valid, but he has a rather prescriptive view that populist rhetoric and popular fictions can always co-opt memory. This denies the complexity of how popular memory works. In Bromley's terms in this conservative, static version of the past 'populist connection is preoccupied with 'traditional values', 'true values', 'fundamental values', 'the tried and trusted values of common sense'. The repetitions, like the constant relay of cultural reiterations on the same theme, have a mesmeric effect.' (1988, p.23). This detracts from the possible agency or strength of individual memories and perceptions in terms of countering unifying heritage rhetoric that does not 'fit' with their memories. Particularly when it comes to heritage as represented through domestic historical objects, people can compare heritage assertions against their own experiences or images of the past. In a similar way to the viewer comment on *The House the 50s Built*, Chapter 3 examined how Mass Observation correspondents were quick to critique 'images' of the past when compared to actual experience, such as G1041 (female, aged 77): 'Images are nothing, mere shadows, compared with experiences you feel on your feet and in every limb and all the senses, not just the eyes'.

Heritage finds its way into the visual realm through historical programmes such as *The House The 50s Built*. There has been a development of a more informal and playful style of history television that can arguably be seen to stimulate imagination and critique, rather than just giving way to pleasurable nostalgia. With a focus towards histories that implicate the intimate

and domestic, the way is also opened for a focus around social history and everyday life experiences. Jerome De Groot has observed that since Raphael Samuel denoted the media as part of history as a 'social form of knowledge':

> a flourishing market for cultural histories, celebrity historians, historical novels, films, TV drama, documentaries, and a number of cultural events from the launching of the *History* Channel to the David Irving trial have pushed 'History' into the mainstream in a number of new guises. (2009, p.2).

Indeed, British digital channel *Yesterday* (formerly *UKTV History*), launched in 2009, creates a general feeling of 'pastness' with a broadcasting theme that weaves in and out of 'factual', 'reality' and 'fantasy' genres. A typical schedule mixes antiques (*Antiques Roadshow*, *Treasure Detectives*), archaeology (*Time Team*), documentaries (*Nazi Hunters*, *A History of Modern Britain*) and period dramas (*Lipstick on Your Collar*, *All Creatures Great and Small*).

De Groot further explores the role of history TV as having a great influence on the 'packaging of historical fact and a creation of history as leisure activity' (2009, p.147). It can be seen that television's role in creating 'history as leisure' contributes to a link between heritage and visual culture, as well as an interest in consuming objects and lifestyles from the past. De Groot examines the narrative history programmes of Simon Schama and David Starkey and the development of new technologies of CGI and reconstruction in these relatively traditional formats.[70] Crucially for this chapter, he examines the dynamics of

[70] A thought provoking intervention on the 'historical' TV scene was the BBC Two's 2014 series, *Ian Hislop's Olden Days*, which seemed to revel in the imagined past in a similar way to Raphael Samuel. The 'olden days' of the title was to do with the vague sense of the past called upon throughout history through myths and legends, always changing and evolving for present needs. Hislop introduced the first episode (on 'heroes' King Arthur and King Alfred) thus: 'In this series, I'll be enjoying the very best of the 'olden days', as seen in our art, our literature and our, occasionally delusional, collective consciousness. […] The olden days has the best characters and the best stories, though not necessarily the best facts. […] But the extraordinary thing about the olden days is that they've always been alive and active, creative, and influential. And very much in the here and now.' (*Ian Hislop's Olden Days,* BBC Two, 9 April 2014).

'Reality' history such as in series like *The 1940s House*, where a family are transported to the experience of immersing themselves in an 'authentic' 1940s lifestyle. Further examples of this combination of reality TV and history documentary also include the celebrity family tree investigations of *Who Do You Think You Are?* and the transportations of families 'back in time' in *Turn Back Time: The Family.* Even those programmes headed up by the traditionally authoritative narrator have embraced a sense of experience and immersion, such as Dr Lucy Worsley's programmes which 'aren't sniffy about re-enactors' and often involve the historian participating in reconstructions (Heathcote, 2011). *If Walls Could Talk: A History of the Home* had Worsley gamely trying out Tudor cleanliness regimes (not washing for a week) and sleeping on a straw stuffed mattress for a night at the Weald and Downland Museum. In something of a backlash to all this perhaps, the government's proposals for a new history curriculum in 2013 seemed to challenge touchy-feely re-enactment in education, with Education Secretary Michael Gove criticising as 'dumbing down' innovative methods such as 'studying the battle of Hastings by re-enacting it on a field with softballs, spending three lessons making castles out of cardboard boxes, making Plasticine models to represent Hitler's main aims as Fuhrer and recreating life on a slave ship by making pupils gather under their desks' (Hope, 2013).

Returning to history television, De Groot observes that 'A key question to be kept to the forefront when looking at all this documentary material is to what extent it contributes to the seeming democratisation of history and the enfranchisement – bodily or imaginatively – into agency of the historical subject' (2009, p.148). For De Groot, this is a difficult question to answer equivocally;

while reality TV offers a way for the audience to relate to those ordinary participants who are experiencing history first hand, they are also alienated from the process by the necessarily constructed nature of the programme – the presence of the camera, editing, and the interventions of presenters (p.180). Indeed, in some ways, recent reality TV versions of heritage have allowed an exploration of history in complex ways, while also drawing attention to its own constructed nature. For instance, BBC One's *Turn Back Time: The Family* (2012) transported a group of families back in time to live on a different street in different eras (one per episode), focusing their lives around the particular social class their ancestors would have been in at the time.

The series bypassed the 1950s specifically – focusing on the Second World War and then jumping forward in the next episode to the 1960s, illustrating the kind of categorisation the 1950s is often slotted into as a 'post-war' era or as part of the 'long 1960s'. However, this was an example of re-enacting heritage in the domestic sphere which while appealing to a broad popular sense of the past did not depict a picture of universal experience. The series illustrated history as a process of change and diversity in everyday life, with class situated individuals being impacted variously by the broader narrative of history. Furthermore, the interventions of presenters such as historical consultant Juliet Gardiner reminded participants and viewers that this was not actual time travel, but an ordinary family experiencing the past through the lens of the present, and reflecting on this. In short, it can be said that heritage television has not only begun to personalise history through immersive reality TV styles, in order to appeal to audience experience and empathy, but they have also made history personal and arguably about 'ordinary people'. Styles

of reconstructing the past in an aesthetic sense has also opened up possibilities for discussion and debate, as I illustrated with *The House The 1950s Built.* Even if programmes present a relatively conservative, unified version of the past, through depicting the more intimate aspects of the past which engenders empathy from the audience, this personalisation can trigger a strong audience response as they identify or not with the representations. Programmes can also more pointedly raise other perspectives and critique such as the way Juliet Gardiner was utilised in *Turn Back Time*.

The representation of the national past on television which focuses on individual stories, domesticity and social history somewhat counters the idea of heritage as presenting a narrow and conservative version of history. Furthermore, while there is a shared collective perception of the national past called upon in representations on television I argue this does not necessarily close off more individual stories such as the focus on domesticity and social history. There are also potential benefits for creating unique collective identifications through reflexive historical re-enactment and revival on television and in other media. Representations in the media as well as retro revivals perhaps contribute to a kind of memory defined by Alison Landsberg as 'prosthetic memory': 'memories of events through which one did not live' (2003, p.148). The idea of prosthetic memory is illuminating for the concepts of 'retro' explored in the previous chapters where people who have not lived through a particular time still can feel nostalgia for it. Prosthetic memory allows a more positive assessment of the 'imagined past' in which a nostalgia for a time through which one has never lived can create empathy and new communities of understanding. Landsberg argues that prosthetic memory is created as a form

of collective memory through media such as film, television and the internet, accessible democratically through the proliferation of such technologies (p.149).

While prosthetic memory may therefore relate to specific technologised societies, it is valid here in terms of giving agency to those audiences who experience images of the past through mediated and visual imagery. Technology allows for a broader shared cultural, collective memory and images of the past. Rather than view this as deception, Landsberg suggests, 'commodities, and commodified images, are not capsules of meaning that spectators swallow whole, but rather the grounds upon which social meanings are negotiated, contested, and sometimes constructed.' (ibid.). Related to my discussion in the last chapter about television and shared mediated memories, Landsberg takes this further politically to emphasise that rather than atomising the individual, prosthetic memory can lead to group affiliations and empathies: 'Commodification does not necessarily mean atomisation. Paradoxically, it can help overcome the atomising effect of private memory […] by making memory more radically public.' (p.158). Can radical and collective affiliations be utilised around these universal, shared 'memories', images or myths of the Fifties? I discuss this further below.

*The Fifties: shoring up the status quo or an agent for change?*

As I illustrated, it is possible to view heritage as 'stuck' in the past, presenting an inflexible and ready-made version of the national past as visual display, an invitation to veneration and nostalgia for a very specific version of Britishness without critique. However, through looking at some examples of the ways Fifties heritage have been deployed at different times, it is possible to take an alternative view of heritage as a challenge to conservatism, as well as a

reclaiming of patriotism to engender political change in the present. It is clear that the context of remembering influences the way the 1950s have been represented and what they signify – again, the past-present relation is critical.

As I have explored above, Richard Wright clearly saw the past being used as a retreat from the dissatisfactions of the present as well as a reaction to the perceived rate and nature of social change up to that point. According to Wright: 'History becomes, more urgently, the object of ceremonies of resonance and continuity when it seems actively to be threatened and opposed by an inferior present epoch' (p.166). This relates to Robert Hewison's idea of the heritage industry thriving in a culture of decline. Related to the idea of a culture which has developed technologies for continually reworking the past in a sea of simulacra, Hewison suggests a culture with no creativity or potential left – postmodernism. For Hewison, this is 'modernism with the optimism taken out. The prefix suggests that nothing has happened since.' (p.132). It is possible to see the Fifties revival in similar terms as a product of Thatcherism, as suggested by Janice Winship in her analysis of Fifties-mania in the 1980s (1986). As I explored in Chapter 1, the Fifties revival amongst young people developed in the context of 'a world of YTS and the survival of the most competitive, of increased violence and raised nuclear threat. In such a social context fifties myths strike a vulnerable chord. They speak both of possibilities contemporarily denied the young and of problems still experienced today.' (1986, p.49). In the context of the 1980s, heritage – while not related perhaps to the politics of the 1950s but more in terms of the remembrance of its visual material and popular culture – could be a salve for the hurts of the present.

In 2013, Robert Hewison appeared on Radio 4's *Today* programme to discuss the centenary of the 1913 Ancient Monuments Consolidation and Amendment Act, and illustrated his view succinctly. For Hewison, the heritage industry remains, 'the way we tend to use the past as a kind of comfort blanket to pull up against the oppression of the present […]. There is a thing called history and there is a thing called heritage. In my view history is a valid pursuit whereas heritage […] can turn into a Downton Abbey view of the world, let's say.' (*Today*, 5 March 2013). Tanya Gold, writing in the *Guardian* the same year, suggested 'Who owns patriotism? The left has been too quick to surrender its spoils to the right, largely because so many progressive ideas came from across the Channel, along with the plague […] It is obvious that the right loves only a sliver of Britain; and so it is time for Labour to claim patriotism for itself' (Gold, 2013). Indeed, Britain's new 'age of austerity' with an economic downturn and cuts in Welfare spending by a new Conservative government elected in 2010, has ushered in many resonances and comparisons with the post-war era, examples of which I will explore in this section in order to analyse whether 1950s heritage can be seen as conservative only and backward-looking or as actively engaging in the potential for collective action and more progressive meanings for the future associated with the left.

I take as inspiration the idea of heritage as a politics of 'stasis' from Patrick Wright, who depicted this through his analysis of Margaret Thatcher's use of the past. He asserted that heritage is more frequently of 'the right' in that it can more readily 'reclaim' past traditions and discard what has happened 'since': 'the future of the Thatcher project has, in its distinctive way, often been presented as the past. It is a future in which 'history' is rediscovered and in

which traditions find themselves reinstated in the present.' (1985, p.185). In this context it was difficult for the left to utilise the past in the same way, as 'their' past was something which Thatcher was symbolically positioning herself against:

> While the post-war years have indeed seen some realisation of egalitarian and democratic ideas, an overwhelming greyness has also crept over the picture – the bureaucracy, the waiting lists, the destruction of communities and traditional forms of understanding […]. If an earlier time saw the making of the working class, the events of the post-war years have lent great strength to those interests which now benefit from its unmaking. (p.153)

According to Wright, during this time the left had an identity problem in that calling up its own past appeared problematic and outmoded in the context of the late 20th century: 'Socialism is so evidently not present (except through its mistakes or by negative ascription from its opponents as bureaucracy, union intransigence, East Europe, and so forth.' (p.154). Furthermore, events of the time, such as Labour leader Michael Foot being lambasted in the press for wearing a 'casual' (p.134) donkey jacket at the central London Cenotaph on Remembrance Sunday in 1981, placed the left in a position of 'critical challenge' as opposed to conservatism, the ''natural' guardian of national identity' (p.155).

Whilst not exactly taking the explicit 'Socialist' or 'Conservative' divisions employed by Wright, I aim to analyse the dynamics of some of the qualities associated with these different politics in the Fifties revival. After Wright, I associate a conservative idea of heritage with a representation of heritage that depicts a national past as solid defined tradition, a 'complete' and timeless image; a reverent rather than critical view of the past which is called upon to maintain the status quo. On the other side, I consider aspects of a more 'progressive' ideology of heritage, in which representations of the past offer an

engagement and a critique of problems in the present, with the potential for encouraging agency in the future. As I have explored so far, it can be argued that heritage is not necessarily static by nature, but by being related to the present it is always being shaped and remoulded for present purposes, allowing for reflection and critique of the past.

*The Festival of Britain Then and Now*

This section will examine the relationship between heritage and a diverse politics through looking at the 1951 Festival of Britain and subsequent commemorations of the event which also encompass legacies of the Second World War. Modifying the past or at least manipulating it in some way for the present does not always result in a kind of erasure of the complexities of the historical trajectory. It is possible to explore further tensions surrounding heritage as either 'stasis' or 'progress' through looking again at the Festival of Britain, as well as subsequent commemorations of the event. Again, the context of remembering and representing is key to heritage. I already began to unpick how the 1951 Festival of Britain itself called up heritage in the service of the present, looking back to the Great Exhibition of 1851. Indeed, some have argued that the Festival ushered in a particular kind of representation of the past-as-heritage in an increasingly fanciful and playful style. The Festival brought together past and present (selectively) with references to history and tradition combining with post-war hopes for the future and innovation. With a freewheeling attitude towards the boundaries of art and science, the Festival's combinations of past and present also sometimes bordered on humorous kitsch, as Michael Frayn observed of the re-enactments at Battersea Pleasure Gardens:

> There was something too insistently whimsical about the Guinness clock and the Emmet Railway, and something even worse about the orange-girls, dressed up as replica Nell Gwyns, articulating 'Come, gentle people, buy', in sub-Roedean accents, like air-hostesses at a fancy dress ball. (1963, p.349)

Indeed, Raphael Samuel has also celebrated in particular the Festival's Pleasure Gardens as itself part of the history of 'retrochic', parodying Egyptian and Gothic typefaces: "fun or 'fairground' lettering in preference to the sans-serif of the severities of Helvetica' (1994, p.92). He goes on:

> In its play aspect, its love of dressing up, and its taste for histrionics, retrochic rejoins, and could be seen as a late offspring of, that self-indulgent strain in British national taste which design historians see as a kind of antiphon to the austerities of post-war Britain…At the Festival itself there were such wayward exercises in the aesthetics of the absurd as the 'Lion and the Unicorn' pavilion, which celebrated the greatness and 'whimsicalities' of the British national character […]. Outside the Festival, but closely related to it, one might instance the opening […] of the first pretend Victorian railway […] and the Whitechapel Art Gallery's celebration of the 'Unsophisticated Arts', those of the fairground and the seaside in particular. (p.93)[71]

It is therefore possible to link elements of the Festival to a mode of representing the national past in a playful, rather disorientating way. The Festival itself has become a means through which the 1950s has been recalled and remembered in the years since – through collecting souvenirs for example. Perhaps the particular style of Festival – the anachronistic combination of visual displays, the bringing together of tradition and the future, the serious and playful – have made it an easy and pleasurable reference point for those looking for an image of the Fifties as irreverent, colourful and whimsical.

While the complex question of what the 1951 Festival signified in terms of visions of 'Britishness' in 1951 is an intriguing one, I will not go into that

[71] Here Samuel references the Whitechapel Gallery's 'Black Eyes and Lemonade' exhibition mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, an exhibition reprised in 2013 at the same gallery.

debate here.[72] However, it is useful to consider that in its reception it was more seen as a politically left/Labour event. According to Becky Conekin, it was 'a Labour extravaganza, with a social democratic agenda' (2003, p.26). Gerald Barry, editor of the *News Chronicle*, came up with the idea and Labour deputy Prime-Minister Herbert Morrison took the proposal to the House of Commons where it was agreed in 1947 (Rennie, 2007, p.13). Still, the Festival was not without criticism, as 'plenty of people thought it the height of irresponsibility to allocate £11 million to having a fling' (Lewis, 1978, p.11). Similarly, Noel Coward's 'Don't Make Fun of the Fair' condescended to the Festival with the lyrics 'Take a nip from your brandy flask/Scream and caper and shout/Don't give anyone time to ask/What the Hell it's about.' (qtd. in Frayn, 1963, p.334). Indeed, for Michael Frayn, looking back at the Festival from 1963, it represented a bittersweet nostalgic memory as the last event of the 'herbivores' (1963, p.331). Frayn depicts a split in the middle-class in terms of views of the Festival: the 'carnivores' illustrated as the elite, snobbish, conservative middle-class of 'the readers of the *Daily Express*; the Evelyn Waughs; the cast of the Directory of Directors' (ibid.) hated the Festival:

> Festival Britain was the Britain of the radical middle-classes – the do-gooders; the readers of the *News Chronicle*, the *Guardian*, and the *Observer*; the signers of petitions; the back-bone of the B.B.C. (ibid.)

This was a state-sponsored celebration of Britishness, with the twin aim of not only being 'a fling' but also, 'madly educative' as Kenneth Williams put it (qtd. in Kynaston, 2009, p.7). No hog roasts or pork pie sandwiches at this celebration, Ian Jack recalls watching a black and white film of the original Festival, which

[72] This is a subject tackled in detail by Conekin (2003) and Atkinson (2012).

‘showed men eating sandwiches so floppy, thin and underfilled that they might have been biting into pressed white handkerchiefs.’ (Jack, 2011, p.33).

Obviously direct comparisons were made between the 1951 Festival of Britain and its 60th anniversary commemoration on the South Bank in London in 2011. The Festival featured a range of cultural events including art, speakers, music, performance and comedy, which spoke of a literacy in Fifties culture from and since the 1950s, such as comedian Stewart Lee’s ‘Austerity Binge’ which referenced Bevis Hillier’s design book of the same name and referred to a programme of musicians and comedy curated by the comedian. The exhibits on offer at the Southbank celebrations were a rather arcane tour through past and present, the sublime and ridiculous – the giant straw fox, a giant seagull, beach huts, a pop-up Bombay beach bar, a fake sandy beach, 1950s-inspired ceramics to purchase at the Southbank Centre shop, Festival of Britain knickers.

Image 22: Festival of Britain knickers, Museum of '51 exhibition, Southbank, 2011. (photograph by the author)

Ian Jack suggested the commemorations of 2011 can be aligned with the present in terms of its similarly baffling (pointless?) array of exhibits as well as uses of irony.

> Outside, a row of brightly-painted beach huts have been erected along the Thames embankment beside an “urban beach” of yellow sand. […] They brighten up the place, as do the yellow flags labelled with seaside words that are draped over the South Bank’s concrete balustrades: FACTOR 50, FISH AND CHIPS, BILLOWING WINDBREAKS. But for those people unwilling to extend the idea of art to anything that calls

> itself that, they invite questions that I first heard asked at this same site 60 years ago. What was the purpose of the Skylon? What was it for? (2011, p.33)

He also supports the idea that the original 1951 Festival defined a culture of whimsicality and irony, 'well-established in British life since.' (ibid.). Jack seems ambivalent about whether the 'herbivores' – those liberal, educated-middle classes – are still running the show however. He notes that 'Frayn thought he was deep inside a carnivorous age. How little did he know. The South Bank anniversary celebrations are sponsored by Mastercard, Louis Vuitton supports Tracey Emin. Irony has never been more useful.' (ibid.). Were these commemorations of the Festival merely a conservative, corporate event?


Image 23: Southbank Centre Celebrates Festival of Britain, Southbank, London, 2011. (image from Southbank Centre website)

What is key to the way the 1950s have been represented in heritage is the context in which they are remembered (or forgotten). The Festival is an example of this, in one way a rather obscure and forgotten event, arguably kept alive by the activities of a dedicated group of souvenir collectors (see Rennie, 2007). Becky Conekin notes the fact that while the 20th anniversary of the Festival was not celebrated in 1971, the 25th was celebrated in 1976 with an exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum:

> Not every twenty-fifth anniversary warrants an exhibition in a national museum […] what was it about the year 1976 that made these London museum administrators, architects and planners wish to celebrate the 1951 Festival of Britain and its visions of Britain and Britishness? Was it the state of the Labour government, with the resignation of Wilson in that year? Or was it the state of the British economy […] Or the consistently high level of unemployment […]?
> (2003, p.3)

Conekin highlights the potential reasons why architects of heritage may have chosen to remember the Festival of Britain as a sign of past glories in the face of present decline, seemingly enforcing the 'heritage industry' thesis which suggests that heritage is called upon in conservative ways to strengthen the idea of a strong nation in times of strife. However, it is also possible to relate this commemoration to a growing appreciation of post-war design, marked by Bevis Hillier both as joint editor of the 1976 exhibition catalogue *Tonic To The Nation* as well as his earlier homage to 1940s and 1950s styles, *Austerity/Binge.* As I have explored elsewhere, the growth of a broader trend in youth cultures for 1950s styles is further evidence of the 1950s 'coming back' in the 1970s. Since then, the Festival of Britain was not publically remembered again until the 60th anniversary. In a similar way to Ian Jack above, Niki Seth-Smith analysed the South Bank celebrations in relation to the context of the present, specifically in relation to Britain and its nations. For Seth-Smith, it represented 'a microcosm of the Union and its problems' (2011). In some ways Seth-Smith critiques the narrowness of the British vision – unlike the original Festival of Britain which was celebrated with nationwide events, the festivities were limited this time to London's South Bank, 'a brisk walk from the halls of Westminster' (ibid.).

The original 1951 Festival of Britain was as much about the future as the past, whereas the 2011 commemorations of the event tended to present a

vague sense of Britishness in the present with a more backward-looking tinge to its retro exhibitions. The focus of the 2011 event seemed more interested in fetishising the aesthetic elements of the past and capitalised on the popularity of retro design in terms of commodities.

Image 24: Fifties interior, Museum of '51, Southbank, 2011. (photograph by the author).


Image 25: Fifties interior detail, Museum of '51, Southbank, 2011. (photograph by the author)

Indeed, vintage-entrepreneur Wayne Hemingway moved his Vintage At Goodwood festival to the South Bank in 2011 to coincide with the anniversary and he stated in the Festival brochure:

> We started our Red or Dead label 30 years ago by trawling jumble sales and charity shops for vintage clothing (or second-hand as it was called then) […] We were particularly attracted to a logo that popped up regularly among old '50s items. That's when we started collecting Festival of Britain memorabilia, hungry to know everything about this bright new dawn for British creativity.
> (Southbank Centre Celebrates brochure, p.68)

The anniversary exhibits often focused on the aesthetic and visual elements of the 1950s such as the 'Museum of '51' which featured a mocked-up 1950s lounge dominated by those items which are desirably fashionable and pleasantly ironic and quirky since the 1950s such as a whimsically printed chair, colourful ceramics, old photographs and a 'television savings' tin.

The 2011 Southbank celebration in was, in a way, a precursor to the festivities of 2012, a major year for British patriotism with the Queen's Jubilee and the Olympics, an introduction into a way into celebrating an idea of Britishness. In the coupling of a historical event with the trend for vintage Fifties-mania, this event could be seen cynically as just another exercise in Fifties retro nostalgia, a way of increasing sales of the latest design trend. As noted elsewhere, the poster for the Festival featured Abram Games' original logo sharing space with Mastercard – an ironic sign of the times perhaps that a celebratory event of this kind could only happen with corporate sponsorship. Wayne Hemingway has certainly made a business out of being a vintage guru, packaging and selling the idea of a vintage 'lifestyle' through acting as consultant editor on the *Rough Guide To Vintage London* (Ambler, Bick, Cook, Jones and Kavanagh, 2013). His foreword illustrates the accessibility of a 'vintage life': 'Whether it's useful tips on where to get your previous 1950s brogues brought back to life like polished chestnuts or the best places to take tea, watch a vintage film, dance to timeless Northern Soul or hire a classic car

to get you round town, it's all here waiting for you.' (Kavanagh 2012, pvi). Here is that tension which is at the heart of resurrections of past styles and heritage – a playful promiscuity with historical eras which lends itself to the pleasures of identity creation whilst also offering a plethora of markets to be exploited. It also potentially creates a dichotomy with memory and experience being selectively represented for the most picturesque or commercial. As I have illustrated, Hemingway has made a business out of vintage, most recently putting his name to a retro sewing range for department store John Lewis, which capitalises on the trend for craft and sewing with vintage-styled accessories.

Image 26: Hemingway Design sewing bag for John Lewis (image from Retro To Go website)

Hence, in some ways the resurrection of the styles associated with the Festival of Britain was just another marketing tool in a culture obsessed with imitating and buying into the aesthetics of the past.

Nonetheless, as I have already illustrated, the original Festival was no stranger to product placement either. Indeed, the re-presenting of the 1950s and the nation through the Festival of Britain at its 'original' moment as well as

its resurrection in 2012 illustrates the tension within heritage in terms of whether it can be seen as a passive, static past that make a consumer industry out of history. Furthermore, the Southbank celebration did not provide an easily packaged version of British identity, asking more questions than providing answers, as Niki Seth-Smith's account acknowledged, there were also other perhaps diverse, 'progressive' images at play: 'the crowds – a snapshot of multicultural Britain – milled around an art installation hung with poems by fifty young refugees; a homage to the 1951 Lion and the Unicorn Pavilion, which featured at its heart a flight of ceramic birds, symbolizing migration and freedom of speech.' (2011). The original 1951 Festival was divided into 27 'Pavilions' which, it was suggested, 'are arranged in a particular order so as to tell one continuous, interwoven story.' (Cox 1951, p.8). While the Festival directors suggested 'This is a free country; and any visitors who, from habit or inclination, feel impelled to start with the last chapter of the whole narrative and then zig-zag their way backwards to the first chapter, will be as welcome as anyone else,' there was a sense that the effect of this may make 'some of the chapters […] appear mystifying and inconsequent.' (ibid.). Similarly, the 2011 Festival suggested visitors follow 'the way to go round' via a yellow line around the edge of the site and orientational 'beacons'. While not offering a concerted critique of the problems of British identity or our relationship to heritage, potentially the disorientating nature of the exhibits on offer, no matter how you approached them, did not provide a confidently drawn picture of Britishness. The 2011 Southbank Celebrates festival used heritage of the 1950s to engage the past with the present, in ways which were frequently consumerist and also perhaps insufficiently engaged with questioning those relationships between past,

present and national identity. While it opened up questions about British identity and in its exhibits, Seth-Smith dismissed it as 'bland' and that its questions did not go far enough (2011). Indeed, Iain Sinclair illustrated the complicated relationship between the 2011 celebrations and the past:

> The 2011 Southbank Festival pays tactful and considered respects to the event that acted as an inspiration. […] A line-up of celebrity chefs, fashionistas, novelists, rock stars, philosophers in debate with prelates, make these themed weekends an authentic mirror of the times. Ray Davies, Tony Benn, Tracey Emin, Heston Blumenthal, Billy Bragg. Tried and tested entertainers will make it a memorable show. A knees-up in a time of austerity. Something both fresh and traditional, slipstreaming another royal wedding. With the underlying motive of reaffirming the status of this transformed riverside zone as a tourist hub and the fitting "cultural quarter" for the 2012 Olympics. (Sinclair, 2011)

Sinclair seems here to suggest that this new event is more about affirming culture, trends and tourism than about defining the nation in any concrete sense.

*The 'legacy' of the Fifties: The London Olympics and 'The Spirit of 45'*

As well as potentially destabilising the ideas associated with 'the Fifties' themselves – that of a unified picture of community and nation – this final section explores the way the Fifties have been used as a way to use heritage as a way of promoting discussion and political agency, not necessarily in conservative maintenance of the status quo but also in different radical ways. I have already introduced the notion of Raphael Samuel's concept of heritage as a more informal folk history, in terms of the collecting and exploration of domestic items, daily ephemera and social history. Samuel felt that there was the progressive potential in 'retrofitting', standing between historical preservation and making something new for the future:

> Retrofitting could also be seen as a force for renewal, creating social and public space, discovering concealed corridors and hidden passages, reoccupying vacant lots, revitalizing redundant plant. The new Liverpool

> Street railway terminal, a brilliant success from the point of view of the creation of social space, and a fascinating combination of old and new, may serve as a corrective to the notion that the hybrid is necessarily inferior to the pure.
> (1994, p.78)

As well as these benefits to architecture and social space, as mentioned previously Samuel also analysed the potentially 'radical' groups that embraced British heritage in the name of left politics such as the Clarion Club. Indeed, Michael Frayn's 'herbivores', the architects of the Festival of Britain frequently harnessed British heritage to translate this into the idea of a democratic, socially-conscious utopian future. I also have in mind Patrick Wright's critique of heritage as mostly conservative and passive, partly due to the problematic relationship of the left with its own past, as well as having less claim on the ideas of national identity and tradition.

Can Fifties heritage be used with agency or for 'radical' means in the present? In a simplistic sense, it is possible to think of the Fifties in conservative terms as 'going back' to a simpler, more traditional time and I have explored myths of this in previous chapters. However, as I have illustrated, the Thatcher project did not actually choose to use the era in a celebration of the British nation, instead making reference to a time *before* everything 'went wrong' in the post-war era. I explored this idea with my interviewees, and indeed, while many saw it as a time of 'tradition', they also were inclined to associate Fifties heritage with a time of great change and hope. For example, as I have already explored, Emma viewed it as alternately oppressive and exciting, Allen in some ways viewed rockabilly music as the beginnings of cultural integration between blacks and whites in America, and Donna had ideas about the ending of the Second World War as potentially contributing to a

feeling of optimism: ‘I think maybe it was more fun because the war had ended and...I don’t know there’s... Life seems more complicated these days although I obviously wasn’t living in the 50s so I don't know if that’s true’ (Donna i/v). Indeed, this could in part be a reaction, in Wright’s terms, to the pace of change; nostalgia brought on by modernity’s ‘dislocation, […] devaluation and also the disenchantment of everyday life’ (p.19).

The year of the London Olympics, Hari Kunzru wrote rather scathingly that the ‘regeneration’ of Stratford and East London was a kind of cleansing of the working-class heritage of the area:

> The typical east-London streetscape of pound shops and groceries may be unaesthetic, but it represents interwoven circuits of production and consumption that are local and targeted at the people who are already here, instead of those developers would like to see coming, people with more disposable income and fewer social problems, who will eat tapas while wearing La Perla underwear and playing with their new phones. (2012, p.87)

Here, ‘regeneration’ appears to be nothing more than a kind of ‘social cleansing’ (ibid.) in an area that had previously fallen victim to the failure of ‘past planning experiments’ (p.88). The national event of the Olympics criticised by Kunzru focused on the increased privatisation of public space and the displacement of working-class communities, to be replaced by the more image-friendly shopping malls and expensive apartment complexes. The development of East London is viewed by Kunzru as a kind of hypocrisy hiding behind the idea of a universal ‘Olympic legacy’; a notion that only those with ‘the money to play’ will benefit (p.90). Despite this tension, aspects of the London Olympics presentation and image did *not* cleanse away history and heritage, but celebrated them, sometimes controversially. Here it is possible to find examples of the association of ‘Fifties Britain’ with a kind of progressive, radical left project. As

part of my forthcoming discussion, I acknowledge that this is often connected to the 1940s, but it is also linked in popular memory to a kind of 'post-war' continuum of regeneration and optimism, which also implicates association of the 1950s with progress and ideas for the future. Much of this is part of calling up another era's version of austerity to compare it with how we are dealing with this situation in the present, again affirming the past-present relationship in heritage and popular memory.

The Fifties can be seen as an inspiration and a political alternative to public spending cuts, and there is evidence that the left are increasingly engaging with and celebrating an idea of the national past in order to critique the present.[73] This was hinted at in Danny Boyle's opening ceremony for the 2012 London Olympics. Sarah Wrack reviewed the ceremony for the Socialist Party newspaper, describing how 'The reaction of the right wing to the Olympics opening ceremony says it all. It was attacked in a racist, reactionary, anti-working class article in the *Daily Mail* […]' (Wrack, 2012). Indeed, Wrack describes how the historical scenes gave 'a glimpse of the role of the working class. Isambard Kingdom Brunel and his capitalists looked on and directed from afar as the workers toiled and heaved to bring about the industrial revolution.' (ibid.). Indeed, what Conservative MP Aidan Burley had called 'leftie, multicultural, c***' (Groves, 2012) was an extravagant breeze through British history with all the usual popular cultural totems from Shakespeare to the Beatles. It also included a celebration of the National Health Service with dancing nurses and lights which spelled out 'NHS', followed by 'GOSH',

[73] Another example of this in more general terms is Billy Bragg's campaign to reclaim the St George flag from far-right groups (2010), as well as his part-memoir-part-exploration of the possibilities of patriotism in a Socialist context (2007).

representing the Great Ormond Street Hospital.[74] Readers of the *Observer* wrote in to celebrate the ceremony, its progressive vision of Britishness and the NHS in particular, one writer called it 'a very British vision of toleration and togetherness, rather than a triumphalist jingoistic version' (*Observer* Letters page, 5 August 2012).

As representations of heritage, these displays illustrated a more 'peoples' history' version of Britain, albeit it through great events and sweeping cultural movements. As I have explored, history television and period dramas have also followed this trend and more specifically in recent depictions of the post-war era. The context of the Fifties as defined by a post-war spirit of change and hope has been called upon in two prominent examples I will explore here, Ken Loach's *The Spirit of '45* and the BBC series *Call The Midwife*. Both seem to 'reclaim patriotism', celebrating radicalism and optimism as British heritage in the history of state welfare provision, slum clearance and modernisation in post-war Britain. This also in some ways relates to Raphael Samuel's own project of reclaiming history and the heritage practices of ordinary people and celebrating heritage as 'a term capacious enough to accommodate wildly discrepant meanings' (1994, p.205). Ken Loach's historical documentary is framed around oral testimony of patients, workers, doctors and nurses, about the history, heritage and benefits of the NHS, as well as emotive reflections on the consequences of a lack of state welfare provision until legislation coming out of the 1942 Beveridge Report bringing in the 1948 establishment of a National Health Service (Kynaston, 2008, p.26). The film's website also features interactive elements in similar style to the 'You in '52' BBC website game:

[74] As both an NHS children's hospital and a charity with a long history of philanthropic support, Great Ormond Street perhaps represented the tensions and limits of state provision.

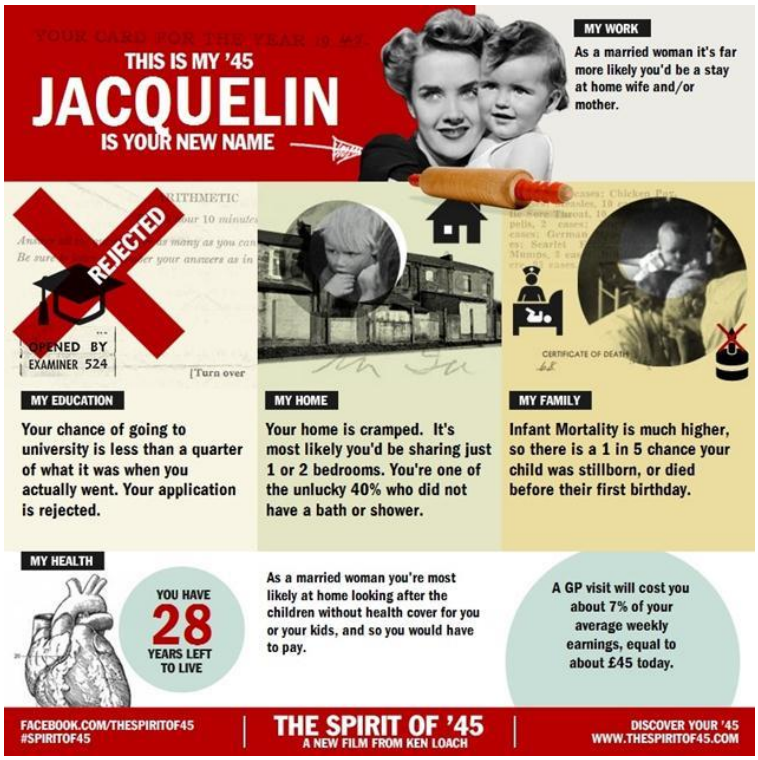



Image 27: 'My '45' interactive site from the *Spirit of '45* website. (http://www.thespiritof45.com/My-45)

Users are invited to enter their personal details in order to create a profile of 'My 45': 'Before the spirit of '45 transformed British life, what would my life have been like?' (*The Spirit of 45* website). By reminding viewers of a specific moment in British history – the end of the Second World War, Loach compares the immediate post-war deprivations with the demands for improvements and a vision of the welfare state as noble national ideal; something worth remembering and protecting today. Indeed, as a direct outcome from the film, Loach made a call for a new unity of the left against New Labour, making a specific comparison between the history explored in the film to the present political context:

> the promise of opportunity, dignity, health and work, fulfilled by Labour's welfare state after 1945, is not to be one that we can look to today's Labour party for. Yet contemporary Britain – and beyond – is precisely where such policies are needed.
> (Loach, Hudson, Achcar, 2013)

Indeed, this appeal led to the formation in 2013 of a new activist group, *Left Unity*, which aims to bring together splinter groups of the left in order to fight against the cuts in welfare spending in Britain by the Conservative-dominated coalition government: 'The need for unity is paramount as attacks on the living and working conditions of ordinary people intensify, and the very fabric of our welfare state is being destroyed.' (Left Unity website). Indeed, this political mobilisation of the left has been achieved specifically through the use of history and heritage and the idea that a part of our 'national' heritage is under threat in the present.

In popular memory, the idea of the progressive, Socialist mood and consequences of the post-war settlement of the 1940s has been aligned with the aesthetic representation of the 1950s in recent TV period dramas. For example, *The Hour* featured Communist journalist Freddie Lyon and his colleagues as defenders of freedom of speech as well as fighters of government corruption in 1950s Britain. *Call The Midwife*, the popular drama following the experiences of midwives working in a deprived area of 1950s London frequently reflects on and celebrates the establishment of welfare and social care. For example, series two featured an episode where Nora, a woman with a loving husband but too many children to manage, finds herself pregnant and almost dies from a botched amateur abortion. The episode critiques the Fifties status quo – Nora begs the doctor for help but the doctor insists 'We can only sterilize where it's medically necessary'. Pointedly referring to the days before safer, reliable options for birth control, Nora resorts to a brutal, illegal back-street abortion before being saved by doctors who 'asked no questions'. *Call The Midwife* situates the NHS within the social mores of the 1950s (abortion being

illegal and minimal family planning advice being offered to married women only) while from a position of hindsight focusing specifically on significant issues in the NHS' history, and the unspoken health benefits that have developed since. Crucially, as I explored in the previous chapter, Fifties representations in period dramas aligns *then* with *now*; in the case of *Call The Midwife* the 1950s are seen from a position of present hindsight to remind the audience that despite its challenges and tensions, the Fifties brought progress and the dawning of a more egalitarian society through the development of a universal healthcare scheme.

*Conclusion:*

I began this chapter with a quotation from Raphael Samuel critiquing the idea that the emphasis of heritage on immersion, experience and the visual is necessarily manipulative, passive and politically conservative. This concluding chapter has chosen to bring together popular memory and the idea of heritage as useful companions to analyse the deployment of the 1950s in broader terms of the national past in Britain. The context of Thatcherism ushered in a proliferation of interdisciplinary literature on the uses, abuses and popular sense of the past broadly interested in heritage, popular and collective memory. Today, heritage relates to popular memory in terms of being an aesthetic, displayed version of history, bringing history into the intimate present through imaginative methods and developing technologies such as the internet.

While Wright and Hewison's work engaged with heritage in the context of a culture they defined as backward looking and conservative, I have attempted to interrogate these notions with reference to representations of Fifties heritage in Britain in the last ten years. The coalescing of national feeling around the

Queen's Diamond Jubilee in 2012 was frequently expressed through recourse to her Coronation in the 1950s but frequently created an absurd scenario where a sense of national identity was applied to anything from Marmite to toilet paper. Furthermore, contrary to shoring up a static version of national identity, the focus of 1950s heritage as a consumer culture is centred very much on an intimate connection with ordinary peoples' lives and pleasures in the present, whether through a Cath Kidston tea towel or a rare and prized vintage dress. This link of the past with everyday life objects makes the past domestic and familiar but also alienates us from the past in its more absurd commercial manifestations which indiscriminately blend past and present to make new commodities.

It is also possible to analyse commemorations of the national past such as 2011's Festival of Britain 60th anniversary on the Southbank not only as illustrating the impossibility of a unified British national identity but also as more an expression of a peak of the trend for the aesthetic Fifties. The transporting of the Vintage at Goodwood Festival to the Southbank as part of the commemorations perhaps brought the story of the British love of playing with and re-imagining the 1950s full circle and back to the Southbank. The original 1951 Festival of Britain depicted a whimsical and playful version of British heritage and identity, and retro culture very much inherits this tradition.

Following Raphael Samuel, I have aimed to explore the tensions around heritage as passive consumerism and suggest possibilities for representations of the 1950s to engage people in active explorations of history as well as referring to history for a more radical present. Ken Loach's *Spirit of '45* seems to affirm Samuel's project of linking media, popular memory and political

agency. After Ken Loach's call to action motivated by his film *The Spirit of '45*, the campaign group *Left Unity* was formed and as of April 2013 over 80 local groups have been set up to discuss the establishment of a new left wing party. It is that optimism which has been used recently in both the Olympics opening ceremony and in celebrations of the welfare state, which have looked back to the post-war era of the late 1940s and early 1950s as in some ways a glory days of Socialism which strikes a poignant chord in the context of public spending cuts. In some ways, 1950s heritage has been used just in order to sell products themed around a particular era and create a consumer trend, but in other recent representations it can be seen that images of the post-war and 1950s heritage have been used in ways that promote political activism and action through a kind of reclamation of patriotism by the left.

## Conclusion: the Politics of Nostalgia and the Fifties Revival

In this thesis I have examined the taken-for-granted world of Fifties retro as a terrain on which the battle for historical knowledge and memory are fought. I have historicised Fifties retro and suggested how this contributes to historical debates and politics, rather than just representing passive consumption.[75] This project has been influenced in part by Raphael's Samuel's expansion of historical thought to consider history as a 'social form of knowledge' (1994, p.8). This idea of the social focuses on the importance of the *processes* of past-making; history as 'activity rather than a profession' (p.17) influenced by history's own 'conditions of existence' (p.15), that is, the present. In this sense, the broad culture of retro implicates heritage, fashion, nostalgia and everyday memories – we remember through family albums and personal memory but these interact with the pleasurable revisions of the past in living museums, favourite films and period dramas. Retro enables an aesthetic intimacy with the past which has implications for personal as well as wider collective politics. I have asserted a more democratic approach to historical study which considers not just 'what happened' in the past but the political struggle at the heart of how we remember and represent the past in the interactive world of personal and collective memory.

I have suggested that there is a dialogic relationship between history, heritage, and popular memory, and this relationship is inherently political due in part to questions about who has the right to define the past and whose past is

[75] Indeed, around the same time that I completed my own research, there were signs of a growing interdisciplinary field primarily concerned with retro and nostalgia. For example, Sarah Elsie Baker's (2013) work on retro design, Rebecca Bramall's (2013) research on austerity culture (which responds to many similar case studies as my own research, such as the commemorative events in Britain during 2011 and 2012) and the edited collection *Media and Nostalgia: Yearning for the Past, Present and Future* (2014).

being represented at any given time. As Katherine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone have explored, memory has become a key touchstone for 'contesting the past'. Utilising Raphael Samuel's rethinking of the boundaries and sources of popular memory they have suggested that his legacy was still waiting to be developed at their time of writing:

> Samuel's central suggestion, that history might use memory actually to rethink its own conceptual and disciplinary boundaries and practices, and to acknowledge common characteristics rather than setting up the two as opposite, does not appear to have found much of a following. (Hodgkin and Radstone eds., 2003, p.3)

This project has firstly taken up Samuel's call for rethinking of conceptual confines, while illustrating the benefits of analysing the tensions (rather than the boundaries) between history, representation and memory. Secondly, it has considered these tensions as exposing the struggles of competing narratives of the past. Thirdly, following Samuel, I have engaged popular representations of the Fifties with a view to affirming the importance of a more democratic view of history as formed by social everyday practices of consumption and production. This project emerged from the development of a less straightforward perception of the study of the past which questions 'Not only the reliability of memory and experience as exact records of the past, but also the very notion of historical truth, have come into question; the past is constituted in narrative, always representation, always construction.' (Hodgkin and Radstone eds., 2003, p.2). Rather than focusing on the contextual 1950s themselves, this study has been more focused on revealing the *processes* by which ideas of the 1950s have come about. Indeed, the tensions and contradictions within the images and politics of the Fifties revival draw attention to the representational nature of the past: we construct popular ideas based on contextual needs in the present.

However, this is not the only revelation that this method allows – it also provides a deeper understanding of the meanings of taken-for-granted historical narratives.

As this thesis has illustrated, there is an element of the Fifties revival which is configured as a comfort blanket for the present – a retreat into the image of a strange yet safe world of tradition and simpler values. Fred Davis' (1979) sociological account of nostalgia made reference to the 1970s in suggesting that there are particular conditions which help mass nostalgia to develop, specifically the notion of cultural upheaval. Looking backwards to the 1960s, Davis suggested that nostalgia is 'most likely to occur in the wake of periods of severe cultural discontinuity' which lends itself to juxtaposing 'the uncertainties and anxieties of the present with presumed verities and comforts of the lived past' (1979, p.141). As I have outlined, it can be seen that the Fifties revival emerged at the time of Davis' writing, through the development of retro style from the late 1960s and through the 1970s in Britain. Defining a culture of 'upheaval' requires more than I have space for here but it would perhaps be tempting to suggest that at the very least the uncertainties of Britain in the early 21st century have provided a climate for a comforting nostalgia of a 'Fifties mystique' to take hold through retro and other popular nostalgic re-enactments. But while this dynamic plays into the way the past is utilised for the present, the relationship is more complicated than this. I will now appraise how I have exposed these complications in the preceding chapters, and suggest ways in which my approach can invigorate future debates on the use of the past and popular memory.

*Re-enactment for the present*

My research illustrates that the Fifties frequently appear to be a re-enactment of the past in some kind of historical sense, but that in fact these activities are more a response to the present than the past. These re-enactments operate largely through the imagined contrasts of Fifties Britain to Noughties Britain defined by recession, food banks, a cost of living crisis and the perceived fragmentation of social relations in our increasingly multi-mediated world. Through the establishment of the welfare state, the high-minded exhibits of the 1951 Festival of Britain and Prime Minister Harold Macmillan's 'never had it so good' consumerism of the latter 1950s, revisiting the 1950s could be seen as harnessing the last gasp of post-war innovation, community and optimism. Myths of the past are frequently packaged as powerful simplistic symbols with which to provide the starkest possible contrast to the lacks of the present; such as a 2014 BBC radio documentary which referred to recession-trapped young people as the 'Never Had It' generation (BBC Radio 4, 11 January 2014) or TV property expert turned craft revivalist Kirsty Allsopp creating a storm on Twitter with a comment that victims of floods in Britain during late 2013 lacked the 'Blitz spirit' (Perry 2013). In order to explore this fully I have employed a methodology focused on the everyday, social and embodied representations of the past through memory, TV and film representations and fashion trends.

I have focused on so-called 'subcultural activity' because the Fifties-inflected culture of 'rockabilly' has contributed to the ways in which Fifties style has come to be popularised and represented, such as the anachronistic appearance of a 'rockabilly' couple in BBC Two's Fifties period drama *The Hour*

or the influence of the rockabilly look on perceptions of style/attitude from the 1950s. While there are unified community practices they share, subcultural boundaries are not always productive for discussing the way these communities diverge and fit within the 'mainstream', hence I situate my interviewees within the broader 'Fifties revival' rather than in 'subcultural' terms. I have suggested that the re-enactment of Fifties styles and leisure cultures is always inflected through the present.

This methodology has gone beyond evaluating how the past actually *was* but examines how it exists outside the academy in the social world. I have argued that retro is a key terrain for exploring popular memory and the relationship between the past and present. In a broader cultural sense, retro and nostalgia feed into one another as a circuit: retro displays an ever expanding range of nostalgic images, which help to further perpetuate a culture of nostalgia and a taste for the past. Though it can help us question ourselves in the present, this response is not always merely as a nostalgic 'comfort blanket' in difficult times. Retro is not a wholehearted rejection of the present, a historic re-enactment or time travel – it is a response to the here and now. An interest in styles of the past is sometimes committed, but relatively fleeting, such as Ralph S who was a rockabilly as a 'less scary' alternative to punk and then as he got older moved more towards the 1930s/1940s-influenced 'swing' scene. A similarly fluid relationship to subcultural identity is reflected by Sarah and Donna, who used to be 'goth' and then switched to Fifties rockabilly styles.

As I have explored, the debate on the meanings and politics of nostalgia has moved forward from the positioning of nostalgia as merely signifying a 'distortion' and distraction from actual history. Nostalgia as more a reflection of

the present is arguably now an accepted notion, even in popular conversations around nostalgia such as a recent example from BBC Two's *Food and Drink* in 2013. As I have discussed in this project, food is often a way the Fifties revival has expressed versions of 'pastness', and the food we eat is a particularly intimate way to seemingly 'recreate' the past in embodied, sensory terms. As the presenters shared their favourite childhood recipes, the discussion moved away to more theoretical discussions about the dynamics of nostalgia. According to presenter Michel Roux Jr, 'We are living in turbulent times and there is no better way to make ourselves feel good about the world than turning back the clock and digging into nostalgic food'. Food writer William Sitwell objected: 'This is nonsense and holds our food culture back. […] This retreat to the food of our grandparents or great-grandparents is a reaction to the stressful times we live in. We are nervous of the future and need to get our head out of the past.' While the discussion debated nostalgia as a reaction to the *present*, both sides of the argument still configure nostalgia as a kind of escapism.

I have slanted the argument differently to allow for nostalgia as an active, conscious position of engagement rather than being a passive 'retreat' from the present. Taking a position which emphasises its 'presentness', I have dug beneath apparently nostalgic representations to engage with the processes at play in the appreciation and display of nostalgia through speaking to individuals engaged in the Fifties revival. While I define nostalgia not as homesickness in its original pathological sense, it is striking how the appeal of the Fifties frequently features as a hobby or interest related to the individual's biography, such as Allen who 'returned' to the rockabilly revival after his divorce, or Dave F who followed in the footsteps of his teddy boy relatives from *The Lambeth Boys*,

or Verity who associated her love for the Fifties with the dreams of glamour and Hollywood as a child. This aspect of the Fifties revival acted as an organising component in the construction of an individual's biography and personal history. Nostalgic images interact with private memory, experience and authenticity, and I have argued that nostalgic images can be deployed in a self-conscious way rather than as just an emotional and unreflexive harking back to myths of the past.

*Myth and the politics of revival*

While many of the case studies I have focused on consider the everyday and disposable, there is a politics in bringing aspects of the past into the present. The qualities attributed to the Fifties are focused on a range of meanings that approach various symbols of an iconic, universal and collective nature: the housewife, red lipstick, domesticity, the teenager, rock 'n' roll, community spirit. These tropes have been elevated to the level of myth, in that Barthesian sense of taken-for-granted symbols which have an easily-accessible meaning 'already relieved of its fat, and ready for signification' (1993, p.149). It is true that myth trades on iconic symbols which have powerful associations, creating 'imagined traditions' and potentially divisions between communities and nations. They can also appear to iron out the subtleties or conflicts of history. However, I have conversely suggested that myth can in fact reveal the tensions and conflicts in the historical narrative when contrasting myths are juxtaposed in the free play of various symbols of the Fifties in retro culture. Myths and clichés are part of the language of popular memory, and the use of myths in combination with other elements acts as a kind of pastiche which begins to undermine the power and authenticity of any one myth.

The contextual and conflicting nature of remembering illustrates this. For example, in the context of feminism in the 2000s the 'Fifties housewife' can signify 'kitchen sink chains' on the one hand, or a self-indulgent fantasy of domestic simplicity on the other – in some ways she becomes just another lifestyle and identity to try on. Added into this context is the reclaiming of certain aspects of the past, such as red lipstick which has its historic connotations not necessarily of beauty as passive, conformist, but as a strong visual challenge. Furthermore, while the 'restorative' nostalgia of the happy arrival and integration of the Indian family in the Patak's advertisement re-imagines the 1950s/1960s as a haven of multicultural tolerance, other aspects of race in the Fifties revival collide and contrast with this myth. While there are aspects of the Fifties revival which are connected to perceptions of the era's mythical history as chiefly white working-class and bigoted (for example, Emma's experience of homophobia), going beyond this there are aspects of diversity and reflexivity within those taking part in the Fifties revival. For example, some Fifties revivalists such as Dave F are thoughtful about the space between 'then' and 'now', and the image of the teddy boys as racist.

Part of the politics of retro is brought out in its role as what Samuel calls 'unofficial knowledge', part of the non-academic and popular dialogue between past and present. In this respect, Mass Observation provides ideal source material, enlivening the discussion of the popular representation of the past through the correspondence of ordinary people in all its fragmented, wide-ranging and unsystematic ways. Mass Observation never claims to be 'representative'; while its correspondents are self-selecting and relatively small in number, they are opinionated and reflexive. In a similar way to Samuel's

focus on popular memory as the commonplace, everyday and taken-for-granted, the Mass Observation Project's founders were motivated by 'a passionate concern for 'trifles' unconsidered by others, for the sights and sounds and smells of ordinary life going on irrespective of politicians and generals' (Calder and Sheridan eds., 1984, p.1). This rich data provides evidence of the *processes* by which people make sense of memory and representations of the past, as well as the interaction between private and collective memory. This focus on processes reflects Raphael Samuel's vision of history as 'an activity rather than a profession' (1994, p.17); activity suggesting movement, agency and participation rather than research and careful, accredited conclusion. It can also yield surprising results. Speaking to those who have an active interest in the Fifties I have also illustrated that what seems like merely a style choice can also be a reflexive one – in the case of 'looking different', taking something out of context, and 'performing' a lifestyle. The centrality of autobiographical and ethnographic approaches to my project has no doubt been influenced by my own biography, in which my own complex and conflicting relationship to the Fifties has given me cause to think beyond the simplistic interpretation of retro culture as unreflective, consumerist nostalgia.

*Rethinking authenticity*

The culture of retro brings together past and present in such a way that authenticity is frequently at its heart. I have argued that authenticity operates as a concept with multiple meanings. It is true that for more committed Fifties revivalists, the 'authentic' object generally has more value than a retro copy; the provenance of the historical object retains associations with authenticity as 'quality' and 'tradition'. However, this is not as significant a distinction or sign of

'belonging' as one might think. If something 'looks the part' then the fact that it is brand new has other acknowledged benefits (a pair of jeans that can be washed rather than Febrezed, for instance). What emerges is a sense of authenticity which is not universal but subjective, related to both the public sphere (trends, consumption, community) as well as the private sphere (personal history, identity, taste). In some ways this stems from retro's role in what Jerome De Groot refers to as 'history as leisure activity' (2009, p.147), coupled with other historical consumables such as history television (in a myriad of forms – documentary, reality television and period dramas), living museums, interior and product design, antique shops, the revival of partner dancing, DIY and craft, fashion revivals[76] and so on. The Fifties becomes a style we can try on, but while it often appears aesthetically unified the meaning of this is not the same for everyone.

Raphael Samuel included 'retrochic' as part of his study of the way the past operates in the present, and while his definition of retrochic focuses on it as a consumer trend he also examines its role in the function of history and a sense of the past. One of the key dynamics of retrochic is its disrespect for authenticity:

> It does not feel obliged to stay true to period; on the contrary, it is never happier than when turning the old-fashioned into the up-to-date. It blurs the distinction between originals and re-makes. It prides itself on being proactive, not so much slavishly imitating the past as reinventing it, making up for the original detail which has gone missing. Like magic realism it abolishes the category differences between past and present, opening up a two-way traffic between them. (Samuel, 1994, p.112)

[76] By 'revival' here I focus on the *idea* of revival of something from the past, whether vintage clothes or perceived ideas about 'tradition' in the craft revival which are not actually always linked to a specific time period.

This confusing landscape nevertheless implicates experience and memory as well as consumption of images of the past or nostalgia for a time through which one never lived. The representation of Fifties fan Joanne Massey's kitchen epitomises these conflicts. In the magazine feature I explored in Chapter 1, Massey's kitchen is a site of both imagination and memory. Her kitchen is all at once a pastiche and also an invitation to remember. Her kitchen is almost too perfect – the colours appear as a Technicolor film with vintage objects artfully displayed; nonetheless, readers are invited to engage and reminisce: 'How many of the items in Joanne's kitchen bring back memories for you?'

There is an apparently reciprocal relationship between the vintage ephemera, glamorous retro reconstruction and 'authentic' personal reminiscence encouraged by the article about Joanne Massey in *Yours* magazine. In a similar way, in 'subcultural' expressions of the Fifties revival we see 'original' items are in some ways valorised in terms of their historical weight and quality. However, it is acceptable and desirable to make contemporary improvements/restorations to these (as in Ralph W's Ford) as well as wearing retro reproduction clothing if it 'looks the part'. Evidence shows that authenticity is less about the importance of vintage objects *from* the actual 1950s; the Fifties becomes a personal structure of feeling, a way of life and making meaning and identities in the present. This feeling is sometimes referred to as 'authenticity' in terms of the self and identity.

*Memory and heritage*

In defending the value of social history in the face of changes to the history curriculum in schools, Tristram Hunt recently suggested 'History is where the great battles of public life are now being fought' (Hunt 2013).

Mentioning the influence of the histories of class, race and gender, Hunt makes reference to the popularity of a more social history style of representational practices in the entertainment sphere, another example of De Groot's 'history as leisure activity':

> In theatre, television, radio and museums, a far more vernacular and democratic account of the British past started to flourish. If, today, we are as much concerned about downstairs as upstairs, about *Downton Abbey*'s John Bates as much as the Earl of Grantham, it is thanks to this tradition of progressive social history. (Hunt, 2013)

In a similar celebration of the multiple voices of history, in 2013 UCL announced that the now 90-year-old David Lowenthal was preparing a new edition of *The Past is a Foreign Country*, affirming the timeliness of his assertion that 'Nostalgia and heritage now pervade every facet of public and popular culture, embracing nature and the cosmos as well as humanity. […] The past, once certified by experts and reliant on written texts, has become a fragmented, contested history forged by us all.' (UCL website, 'David Lowenthal at 90'). The politics of history and heritage have not gone away, though they are perhaps more sympathetic to nostalgic narratives and meanings than Robert Hewison and Richard Wright.

Indeed, as I illustrated with the example of Brighton museum, heritage increasingly focuses on embodied, participatory and aesthetic representing practices related to consumerist 'retro' and subcultural style. The consumer market for retro reciprocally trades on this 'heritage' in a more general 'history as lifestyle' sense, as in a flyer for Donna's Brighton vintage boutique: 'Bobby and Dandy: Vintage and Heritage Clothing'. Indeed, the Fifties 'trend' appears to have predated the wider 'commemoration' of 1950s events. For example, when asked to take part in the Fifties day, I already had a number of 'Fifties-

esque' wardrobe items I could have worn, purchased from high street shops. Retro as an aesthetic phenomenon uses heritage as a style for display through objects and space as well as on the body in fashion; it is also experienced and lived through the perceived leisure practices of the past. Hence, heritage and consumerism are linked and work together to play into our perception of history. Indeed, the broad retro market, as Samuel configured it, was a 'child of the post-war boom' and as such is firmly situated within commodities and capitalism. However, I have illustrated that by exploring the practices by which people make sense of the retro Fifties revival, this is not a simple one-way exchange between producers and consumers. Participants in the Fifties revival create contrasts, tensions, and debates. This is part of retro as a 'social form of knowledge', an active conversation about the past and present.

*Why the Fifties?*

I have illustrated the specific appeal of the Fifties as a pivotal style for retro offering a particularly appealing and interchangeable politics for the present since the 1970s. I have asserted the Fifties' historical relevance in the politics of retro in terms of revealing the idea of history as a 'social form of knowledge', implicating pleasure, personal memory and public representation. Further study could perhaps contrast this with other historical and ethnographic examinations of styles which call up different pasts, such as the popularity of 'Steampunk', which mixes Victoriana with a literary sci-fi imagination. One could also focus on the conditions of another mid-century style, the mods[77],

[77] Mod style's association with a particular sense of time and place (the 1960s, Britishness) has been explored in Robin Ekelund's innovative research on Swedish mods which explores mod with a similar approach to my analysis of rockabilly, considering subcultures through their perceptions and representations of the past (Ekelund, 2014).

emerging in the 1970s alongside a whole host of other style cultures, according to Peter York:

> Come Easter 1980 and the Seaside battles and you could see what had been going on in 1976 and how all the little kids who were ten and twelve then had taken it in. The mid-seventies Phoney War. The journalists who went down to cover the mods and rockers reruns got themselves tied in knots, because they found these battles, these Style wars, with four or five different armies pitching in – skins, rude boys and punks and teds and rockers and rockabillies – they couldn't sort them out. (York, 1983, p.18)

Indeed, mod style has had a lasting influence on popular culture, with echoes of its past finding a way into, for example, the 1990s Britpop scene where 'young British musicians were knowingly reconnecting their music to a fleetingly forgotten heritage, stretching from the rock aristocracy of the 60s – The Beatles, The Kinks, The Who – to the more cerebral elements of punk rock and beyond.' (Harris, 2004, pxv). Wendy Fonarow has placed 'mod' more at the heart of the indie music scene than other style traditions: 'at fairly regular intervals indie has mod revivals. Segments of the indie community dress up in finely tailored 1960s suits similar to those sported by the Beatles in their early days.' (2006, p.45). Other eras represented on television are of course not limited to the 1950s. 1960s and 1950s-set period dramas *Mad Men* and *The Hour* find themselves joined by similarly glossy series set in other eras such as BBC Two's *Peaky Blinders* set in 1920s Birmingham, broadcast in 2013. Along with the new musical genre of electro-swing which mixes the beats of now with the jazz-rhythms of old (with *White Mink* club nights in Brighton and London particularly providing the setting), is it possible that interwar Britain could be the next big thing? Or with the widespread popularity of ITV's period drama *Downton Abbey* and the BBC's commitment from 2014 to a four year season of programmes and activities commemorating the First World War (BBC Media

Centre website), perhaps the Edwardian era will soon be creeping back into retro styles, as it did with the teddy boys?

However, this project has chosen to focus specifically on the Fifties revival because of its particular historical and contextual subcultural influence as a recognisable style of the past, the association of the Fifties with a general sense of 'pastness' and the Fifties' major role in the recent history of retro. The Fifties revival is not just limited to so-called 'subcultural' expressions of style but like retro itself runs messily into our tastes, trends, memories and perceptions of the past. It has provided a particularly revealing way in which knowledge about the past circulates through popular memory in the context of Britain since the late 1960s. The 1950s/Fifties is a decade more frequently conceived by historians by its contradictions rather than consensus – as in Nick Thomas' identification of the 1950s' 'image problem'. This 'image problem' perhaps lends the 1950s the option of potentially being all things to all people, as well as representing in popular memory a kind of watershed of visual, colourful ephemera, Hollywood films and glamorous looks to be plundered again and again. There are many contrasts and conflicts in perceptions of the Fifties which can be tapped into; many pleasures to be had in undermining the supposed 'values' of the Fifties, such as Emma undermining traditional gender appearances by dressing in a traditional 'Fifties' masculine style as a woman.

In social as well as academic terms, the 1950s have played a pivotal role in the birth of cultural studies itself. While the 1950s by no means invented youth culture, particularly powerful and consumable motifs of youth culture have coalesced around the era. This was recognised by Richard Hoggart's early obsession with American cultural imperialism via vivid portrayals of coffee bars,

quiffs and juke boxes; a strong aesthetic of a developing youth culture that has powerfully come to define the Fifties in the popular imagination since. In some ways Hoggart's foundation of the discipline of cultural studies through the Birmingham Centre can be seen as a response, like retrochic, to the 'post-war boom' in consumer culture. Cultural studies and retrochic also emerged in parallel with discussions for democratisation of history to include individual experience (Raymond Williams) as well as the development of oral and social history disciplines in the late 1960s (Paul Thompson). Furthermore, the question of cultural exchange in a multi-mediated world began to be viewed as a circuit characterised by tension and potential resistance, rather than a top-down relationship of cultural producers and receivers (Stuart Hall). Emerging cultural studies scholars of the 1970s were to become obsessed with issues of youth culture, class, race and style, making specific reference to the culture of post-war Britain: the teddy boys, second hand culture and 1950s femininity (Dick Hebdige, Angela McRobbie, Birmingham Feminist History Group).

The wide-ranging emergence of retro as a style in Britain would not have been possible without a more widespread and mass-marketed aesthetic intimacy with the past in various forms in the post-war era itself. This aesthetic intimacy includes the growing desirability of 'heritage' consumables and fashions from the late-1960s onwards, a focus on 'experiencing' the past in the living museums of the 1970s explored by Wright and Hewison, and the growing technological advances which have created a richly 'illustrated' history. Furthermore, this project, examining nostalgia and representing the Fifties, utilises an interdisciplinary methodology which has largely emerged from scholarly debates in the post-war era itself.

*‘Out of the past and into your future’: Fifties nostalgia and the future of retro*

> It’s new fashioned to look old fashioned […]
> Out of the past and into your future comes this news.
> And the news is pleats.
> (Public Service Broadcasting: *The Now Generation*)

Many of the pleasures involved in the Fifties revival revolve around playing with the tension between past and present. Retro as a style is focused on playing with a simplistic appraisal of the Fifties mood but in a way that problematises a simplistic version of nostalgia. As I illustrated in Chapter 3, contrasting myths of the 1950s are frequently used together in ways which creates disjuncture and mismatched ideologies (such as tradition vs innovation and the vamp vs the housewife) which all represent ‘The Fifties’. These myths rub up against each other in ways which create irony, humour and above all the undermining of myth itself, revealing the struggle and discontinuity in historical knowledge rather than a simple linear narrative. Related to this I would challenge the idea that nostalgia is merely static, backward looking and lacks a potential politics of or for the future. The relationship between the imagined past and the future offers an intriguing dichotomy that plays with the tensions of retro in ways that could offer further avenues for research.

Elizabeth Guffey has attributed an irony attached to the Fifties revival which comes from a position of present hindsight and highlights the tensions of the historical 1950s. Citing Richard Horn’s discussion of the ‘1950s in the 1980s’, she suggests this Fifties revival was an ironic expression looking back with present hindsight, a style suggesting ‘easy-going optimism […] shaded by an atomic cloud’ (Guffey, 2006, p.126). Part of the irony of retro frequently comes from the appeal of ‘retro futurism’ – the fascination with futuristic visions and imaginings *from* the past. In relation to the 1950s this has often been

expressed through the popularity of consumables or design which relates to the American 1950s: 'the growth of applied science' (p.124) which brought with it mass production and 'gaudy popular taste' (p.125) as well as the wonder and fear or the atomic age. Guffey illustrates the subsequent stylistic playing with tensions between the American consumer dream and the imminent threat of nuclear destruction, such as in The Clash's *London Calling* album cover in 1979. The main cover design famously utilises the same design as Elvis Presley's debut album, while the inside 'depicted happy dancers blissfully waltzing […] under an atomic cloud.' (p.127). These juxtapositions are not unreflexive nostalgia, but using technologies and visions of the future from the past to question the complacency of that past as well as our own present and future. She suggests:

> The 1950s revival did not only question the past, it also appraised the past's view of the future. Immersion in the 1950s past also meant coming to terms with its culture of technological optimism and discovering that the future is not what it used to be. (p.132)

Indeed, the use of the Fifties revival frequently *blends* pleasurable nostalgic images but creates irony through juxtaposition with our present hindsight.

The tensions I have been exploring, inherently political in terms of the struggle for what the past signifies as well as how it relates to the present, are utilised by the retro market. Related to the use of juxtaposition and irony, there is further scope than this study allows for studying the politics of nostalgia in the relationship between the past and future, visible for example in retro shops as well as in recent examples of popular culture in the form of multi-media music/film collaborations. In the Spring of 2013, a vintage superstore announced its forthcoming arrival in Brighton with a banner reading 'Revisit the past and be part of the future! Watch this space':


Image 28: Vintage City shop, Brighton, 2013. (photograph by the author)

Similarly, for an antique shop (focusing mostly on mid-century curios) in Totnes, Devon called ‘Narnia’ the writing on the wall (quite literally) is ‘THE PAST IS THE FUTURE’:


Image 28: Narnia 'The Time Travellers shop', Totnes, Devon, 2013. (photograph by the author)

This past-future tension often makes the past seem strange, a 'Narnia' to escape to, but also one which relates to the position of hindsight in the present, poking fun at the irony of looking to the outdated past for visions of the future. One could also consider the satirical undertones of the second hand market being the only market for the future, since the 21st century recession-strapped Britain seems rather limited in its innovation and new ventures or manufacturing.

Furthermore, the quotation which opened this section, cut from an archive film and mixed into a track by the band Public Service Broadcasting, brings the past into today's world with humourous undertones. The track title, ironically named *The Now Generation* (Willgoose, 2013), juxtaposed with old fashioned hyperbole about the new out-dated 'pleats' speaks to a generation in the 21st century literate in the pleasures and ironic language of retro.[78] Archive footage is another way in which the past is represented back to us and made familiar. Indeed, the recent success of Public Service Broadcasting has perhaps been assisted by the trend for retro and history-as-lifestyle. Their debut album, released in 2013 with the title *Inform, Educate, Entertain* revealing a playfully didactic mission: to 'teach the lessons of the past through the music of the future' (Public Service Broadcasting website). A unique multi-media act combining a synthpop sound with a promiscuous sampling of archive footage; their live performances featuring projections from the films themselves such as black and white Second World War films, newsreels, and public information films. A review in the *Guardian* used nostalgia pejoratively to suggest:

[78] The clip mentioned at the start of this section samples 'Fashion Parade', a Universal Newsreel from 1964 and a Pathétone clip from the 1930s about clothing in an imagined future. (see additional notes in Bibliography regarding these sources).

> this is a vision of retro-futurism in which Niall Ferguson might feel at home. While PBS [sic] claims they are trying to 'teach the lessons of the past through the music of the future', it's hard to see these songs – taking from WH Auden's Night Mail, celebrating deeds of exploration, or portraying Britain's imperial military might – as anything other than nostalgia. There's little to challenge here: from their wacky stage names to the subject matter, an innate and very British conservatism runs through them. (Hann, 2013)

Here again is evidence of nostalgia in the taken-for-granted sense of an automatically static and conservative view of the past – defined as always 'celebratory' or nationalistic.

However, this project has instead asserted that nostalgic images of the past can be and are used and read in alternative ways. As well as elements of wistful, backward-looking nostalgia, Public Service Broadcasting can also be seen as mixing past and present in order to suggest an alternative future. The opening track *Inform – Educate – Entertain* is a medley of many of the different films sampled during the album, such as this section which cuts together three different sections:

> Out of the past and into your future comes this news and the news is Public Service Broadcasting.
> […]
> They say something about the spirit of our own time; something that will still be worth saying a hundred years hence.[79]
> (Willgoose, 2013)

If there is backward looking nostalgia, it could be said that there is also a challenge here in the irony of a loving celebration of institutions such as 'Public Service Broadcasting' during a time when the government's response to austerity is comprehensive cuts to the public sector (Hutton, 2013). In a similar way to *The Spirit of '45*, a celebration of certain landmark images of British

[79] This track references a number of sound/visual archive sources: 'Fashion Parade', a Universal newsreel from 1964, 'The Story of Television', an RCA film from 1956, 'White Magic', a film from 1940 on the physics, science and applications of light and 'You Have Been Listening To A Recording', a BBC radio programme from 4th April 1942. (again, see Bibliography notes).

popular memory can be used in a multitude of ways to suggest not just how the present is deficient but lessons from the past on alternatives.[80] Furthermore, in December 2013 British Sea Power performed live at The Cutty Sark the soundtrack they created for Penny Woolcock's affectionate historical collage of the British coast using entirely archive footage, *From The Sea To The Land Beyond* (2013). Contrasting images of 'then' with the music of 'now', the past is simultaneously distant, a 'foreign country' and yet part of a familiar landscape of collective memory. While in one way a manipulation of the past through present-day lenses, in affiliating the past with the sounds and looks of now the audience in some ways are invited into a space where the visual relics of history blend with the present.

The act of bricolage familiar to retro – that is, the appropriation of visual aspects of the past, reassembled for the present – is illustrated in the use of archive which assembles popular memory in powerful ways. Creating a popular aesthetic it plays with emotional connections to the past, as well as an alienation from the past in the use of juxtaposition, irony and the contrasts between competing myths of the past. David Lowenthal suggested the growing perceived intimacy with the past: 'Movies and snapshots plunge us into a vivid past – or bring that past directly into the present – seemingly without mediation.' (1985, p.367). While this appears to place the past apparently 'open to perusal as never before' (p.368), Lowenthal recognises the development of an estrangement from any possibility of one authentic past: 'Every relic is a

[80] Another contemporary example of nostalgia for the post-war era being associated with a benevolent state and social welfare is the impressionistic documentary by director Paul Kelly and the band St. Etienne, *How We Used To Live* (2013). Combining the retro and quirky appeal of film footage of the past being made up entirely of whimsical and wistful colour footage of bygone London, the film contained the following tribute nestled in the credits: 'Almost everything you have just been watching was made with funding from the British government between 1950 and 1980' (Harrison, 2014).

testament not only to its initiators but to its inheritors, not only to the spirit of the past but to the perspectives of the present.' (p.412). The historical relics in this case are the voices and images from the archive of broadcasting.

Rather than necessarily alienating us from a 'true' sense of history, in linking familiar images of easily recognisable British culture could make us feel more engaged with our shared collective past – in Woolcock's case the British coastline, fisherman, windblown revellers in Blackpool; in Public Service Broadcasting's case emotive sound bites from Second World War films (for the track *Spitfire*) and national pageantry (for the track *Lit Up*). However, the relationship with the present – contemporary electronic beats, juxtaposition and humour, elaborate staged performances – prevents this from merely becoming jingoistic or purely backward-looking. Instead perhaps, as in Alison Landsberg's concept of 'prosthetic memory' explored in Chapter 4, these projects could enable us to feel more actively connected and engaged with our shared collective past.

To conclude, I have linked the Fifties revival to the 'presentness' of nostalgia and popular memory. Popular memory represents the past through re-enactment, myth and heritage which construct an imagined world of 'the Fifties' characterised by political tension. I have followed this tension through numerous strands where the Fifties have been visible since the late 1960s: vintage clothing, subcultures, Mass Observation memories, music revivals, films, television, museums, cooking, fashion, ephemera and national commemorations. These sources are diverse but unified in that they represent our everyday perception of the past. This is expressed through memory and experience as well as the visible, aesthetic methods of both displaying the past

and embodying the past through lifestyle. On the one hand, the Fifties often support a return to a 'simpler' way of life; a whimsical world of clear-cut gender roles, patriotism and tradition. On the flipside, period dramas such as *Call The Midwife* or the film *The Spirit of '45* calls up the post-war era in a celebration of a more Socialist post-war ambition. The 'domestic goddess' is both revered and reviled – she is simultaneously reclaimed as a symbol of skill, pleasure and choice while the entrapped, overworked housewife is frequently recalled as a warning from history. Nostalgia is certainly an emotional response, in some ways still a 'homesickness' for something lost, but this does not necessarily lead to passivity. The past represented by the Fifties revival echoes with myths and images of the past as the 1950s are imagined as happier, simpler, more traditional but also youthful, rebellious, sexy and glamorous. These contrasts illustrate history and popular memory as a battleground of power and knowledge in the present. The popular memory of the Fifties poses questions about where we have been, where we are now, and where we might be going. Like the youth culture and Levi adverts of late 1970s into the 1980s, in the 2000s it appears the 1950s are being revived for another era of 'crisis', and instead of reading the 'meaning of style', it is necessary to unpick the important politics at the heart of these expressions of popular and collective memory.

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*If Walls Could Talk: The History of the Home*, 2011. [TV series] First episode broadcast on BBC One, 13 April.

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*The Victorian Farm,* 2009. [TV series] First episode broadcast on BBC Two, 8 January.

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## Appendix One: Research Participant Data

*Interviews (ordered by interview date):*

Name: Donna Grimaldi
Gender: Female
Date of birth: 13/04/1977 (33 years old at interview)
Place of residence: Brighton, UK
Date and location of interview: 18/11/2010, Donna's home

Name: Emma Inch
Gender: Female
Date of birth: 04/09/1970 (40 years old at interview)
Place of residence: Brighton, UK
Date and location of interview: 13/12/2010, Emma's home

Name: Dave Penny
Gender: Male
Date of birth: 25/07/1961 (49 years old at interview)
Place of residence: London, UK
Date and location of interview: 16/12/2010, Dave's workplace in London (private office)

Name: Tom Ingram
Gender: Male
Date of birth: 13/11/1944 (66 years old at interview)
Place of residence: London, UK
Date and location of interview: 17/12/2010, Tom's home

Name: Dave Fitzgerald
Gender: Male
Date of birth: 25/07/1957 (53 years old at interview)
Place of residence: London, UK
Date and location of interview: 19/04/2011, Dave's home

Name: Allen Crane
Gender: Male
Date of birth: 14/10/1964 (46 years old at interview)
Place of residence: London, UK
Date and location of interview: 20/04/2011, Allen's home

Name: Verity Waite
Gender: Female
Date of birth: 22/07/86 (24 years old at interview)
Place of residence: London, UK
Date and location of interview: 20/04/2011, Verity's home

Name: Ralph Whyte
Gender: Male
Date of birth: 16/03/1973 (38 years old at interview)

Place of residence: Lancing, UK
Date and location of interview: 09/05/2011, Ralph's home

Name: Ralph Sayers
Gender: Male
Date of birth: 10/06/1965 (45 years old at interview)
Place of residence: Five Ashes, East Sussex
Date and location of interview: 04/05/2011, University of Sussex Library (private meeting room)

*Questionnaire respondents quoted in study (names anonymised and ordered by response date):*

Name: Karen Taylor
Gender: Female
Date of birth: 20/12/1975
Place of residence: Llanbradach, UK
Response recorded: 19/05/2010

Name: Linda Scott
Gender: Female
Date of birth: 12/01/1961
Place of residence: Brighton, UK
Response recorded: 04/06/2010

Name: Sarah Neil
Gender: Female
Date of birth: 24/01/1974
Place of residence: Hove, UK
Response recorded: 29/06/2010

Name: Martin Smith
Gender: Male
Date of birth: 10/02/1978
Place of residence: Hove, UK
Response recorded: 29/06/2010

Name: Mary Long
Gender: Female
Date of birth: 09/04/1966
Place of residence: Lewes, UK
Response recorded: 23/08/2010

## Appendix Two: Photographs of Interviewees
(taken by the author unless otherwise marked)

Image 29: Donna Grimaldi. (courtesy of Russ Bell)

Image 30: Emma Inch at home.

Image 31: Dave Penny at work.

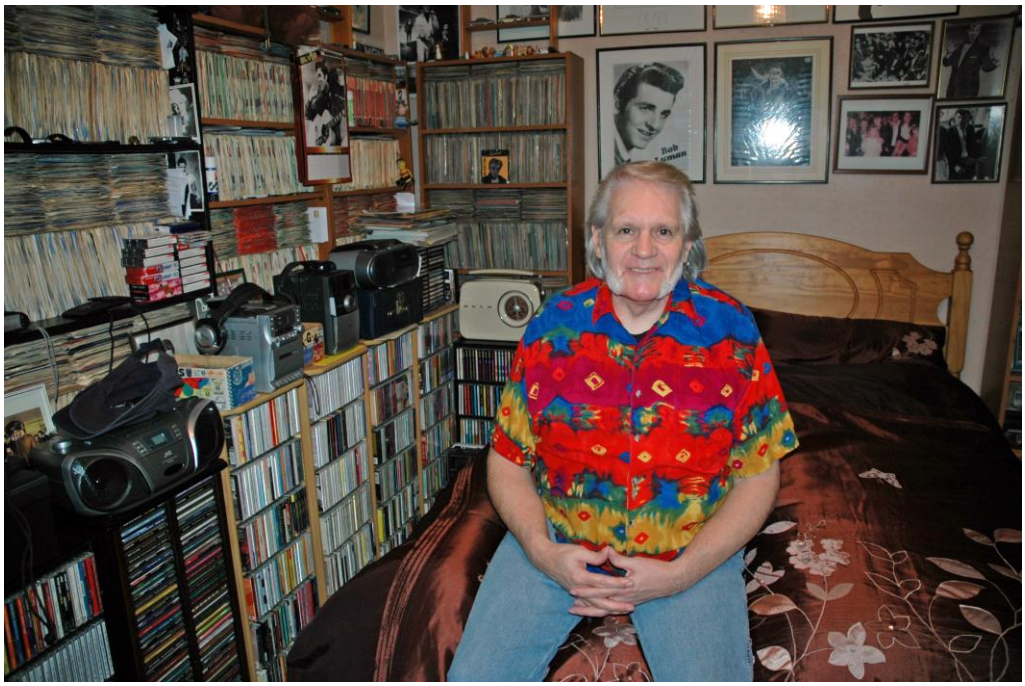

Image 32: Tom Ingram at home.

Image 33: Dave Fitzgerald at home (courtesy of Dave Fitzgerald)


Image 34: Allen Crane at home.

Image 35: Verity Waite at home.


Image 36: Ralph Whyte at home.

Appendix Three: 1950s Research Questionnaire
(accessed online via Google)

# 1950s Questionnaire

Thank you for your interest in this project, which is a research degree based at the University of Sussex, examining peoples' attitudes to past styles. I hope to publish the findings variously through written and possibly audio-visual means. If you are happy to, I may contact you for a full face-to-face discussion, but I wondered if you could initially fill out this questionnaire? Please feel free to write as much as you want after each question. I also have a copy available as a Word document - please email me if you would prefer to use this rather than the web questionnaire. All initial responses will be kept confidential and if published will be made anonymous. If you have any queries please do email me on love1950s@sussex.ac.uk

Full Name:
Email:
Phone number:
Date of birth:
Occupation:
Where do you live:

How did you hear about this project?

How would you describe your interest in the 1950s and how it influences your style/fashion etc?

Does anything in particular epitomise the 1950s for you?

What is it about the 1950s which interests you?

Do other particular past styles interest you?

Where does your interest in past styles mainly focus – clothes, furniture, social life, music, films (or all of these or something else!)?

Where do you get your inspiration from for clothes or objects you collect?

Do you particularly like one style from the past, or is it a mix?

Where do you get objects and clothes from the past from?

If you like older music, do you go to club nights and other social events dedicated to these?

Are there any other hobbies/interests that you have related to your interest in the past?

Do you identify with any particular sort of people/group through the way you dress or through a shared interest in past/vintage style, music or culture?

Do you think past styles are part of the mainstream or something different?

Do you think there's a current trend for retro?

Appendix Four: Advertising Flyer for Participants

# Do you love the 1950s?

Do you identify with 1950s styles and vintage clothes?

Like rock n' roll? (or any other music from the 40s/50s?)

Passionate about the 1950s?

If the answer to any of these is 'yes' then I want to hear from you as I would like to interview people who are interested in the 1950s.

For more information please email Stella:
love1950s@sussex.ac.uk

Appendix Five: Spring 2003 Mass Observation Directive

Part 1 of the directive as it appeared when it was sent out on March 17th 2003:

# The Mass-Observation Project
# Spring 2003 Directive

## *Part 1:*

## *Television & images of the 1950s/60s*

**This directive is about the impact of television on the way we lived during the 1950s and early 1960s, and also on the role of television in influencing the way we think about this period of history.**

There are two sections to part 1. The first part is primarily for those of you who remember living through those years. There is quite a lot of detail in the questions below - possibly more than usual. You may find them useful to prompt your memory, but please don't feel constrained by them. If they don't apply, please ignore. And as usual, please feel free to answer the way that is best for you.

The second is for everyone, whether you lived through the period or not. We are interested in how our collective history is established, so everyone's images of this time, whether from lived recollections or just an understanding of how life was then will be equally useful.

*As usual, please start your reply to Part 2 on a new piece of paper and remember to include at the top a very brief mini-biography: your M-O number, (NOT name), sex, age, marital status, town or village where you live and your occupation or former occupation.*

### Television and everyday life

**Your first TV set**

Can you remember the role television played in your life during the years from the Coronation (1953) to The Beatles (1963)?

Can you recall when you or your family first brought your own TV set? What were the circumstances? Did it, for instance, take precedence over other household goods or improvements?

Was there agreement or disagreement over its purchase? Were there conditions attached to its viewing - especially for children, or maybe the set was bought for older family members?

If you had a television set, where was it positioned in the house? Was it visible from the kitchen or dining room? Was the furniture arranged around it? Did its arrival have an effect on family life and routines? Were meals or social events changed for viewing purposes? Did television influence your food, shopping habits, home decoration, etc?

**Programmes:** which programmes did you watch and why, and was there friction over who watched what? Were 'soaps' a favourite, or youth shows, or American imports such as 'I Love Lucy'?

**Health issues:** Were you in any sense caught up in the public anxieties about the health risks around this 'new technology'?

**ITV and advertisements:** can you remember the coming of ITV and advertisements, and what did you think of them? Did this affect your loyalty, if any, to the BBC or change your viewing patterns?

**TV and your own everyday life:** did you feel television shows reflected your own day-to-day life? Was it just entertainment, or did it offer ideas and ambitions for alternative lifestyles or careers? Was the television a companion in the home? How did it fit in with your own life, for example, whether you were working outside the home, or based indoors? Did it alter childhood expectations and patterns of childcare?

## Memories and images of an era

**For older people:** what are your dominant memories of the 1950s and early 1960s?

**For younger people:** what images do you have of the 1950s and early 1960s? If you are too young to clearly recall these years, where do these memories come from? Can you trace links with any television programme or films?

**For everyone:** do your images stem from shows that depict everyday life then, or maybe from ones that actually originated during those years? (For example, 'I Love Lucy' episodes from the 1950s are still shown regularly on television, 1990s films such as 'Pleasantville' and 'The Truman Show' were set around an understanding of 1950s small town America). Do you feel your understanding of this period stems from an Americanised portrayal?

Do you feel nostalgic for this time, and if so, can you explain why?

Are there any products, sights or sounds you associate with these years?

If your memories are based on your own experiences, can you trace the influence of the coming of television on your own life, your relationships, career, family, expectations, and current circumstances?

How much of a part does it play in your life today?

---

A letter accompanied the directive and explained the following about Part 1 which I have used:

'Please find attached the Spring 2003 Directive. Part 1 is about the 1950s and early 1960s (memories for those who can recall them, images and associations for those who were too young to remember or have been born since). This part of the directive has been suggested by Edwina Griffith, a postgraduate researcher here at Sussex who is exploring the role of television in our everyday lives, in particularly the part in plays in the ways we think of the past.'

The number of directives sent out to correspondents received*:

| | Men | Women | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Numbers sent out: | 87 | 237 | 324 |
| Numbers received: | 45 | 119 | 164 |

*As of 19/8/2004.